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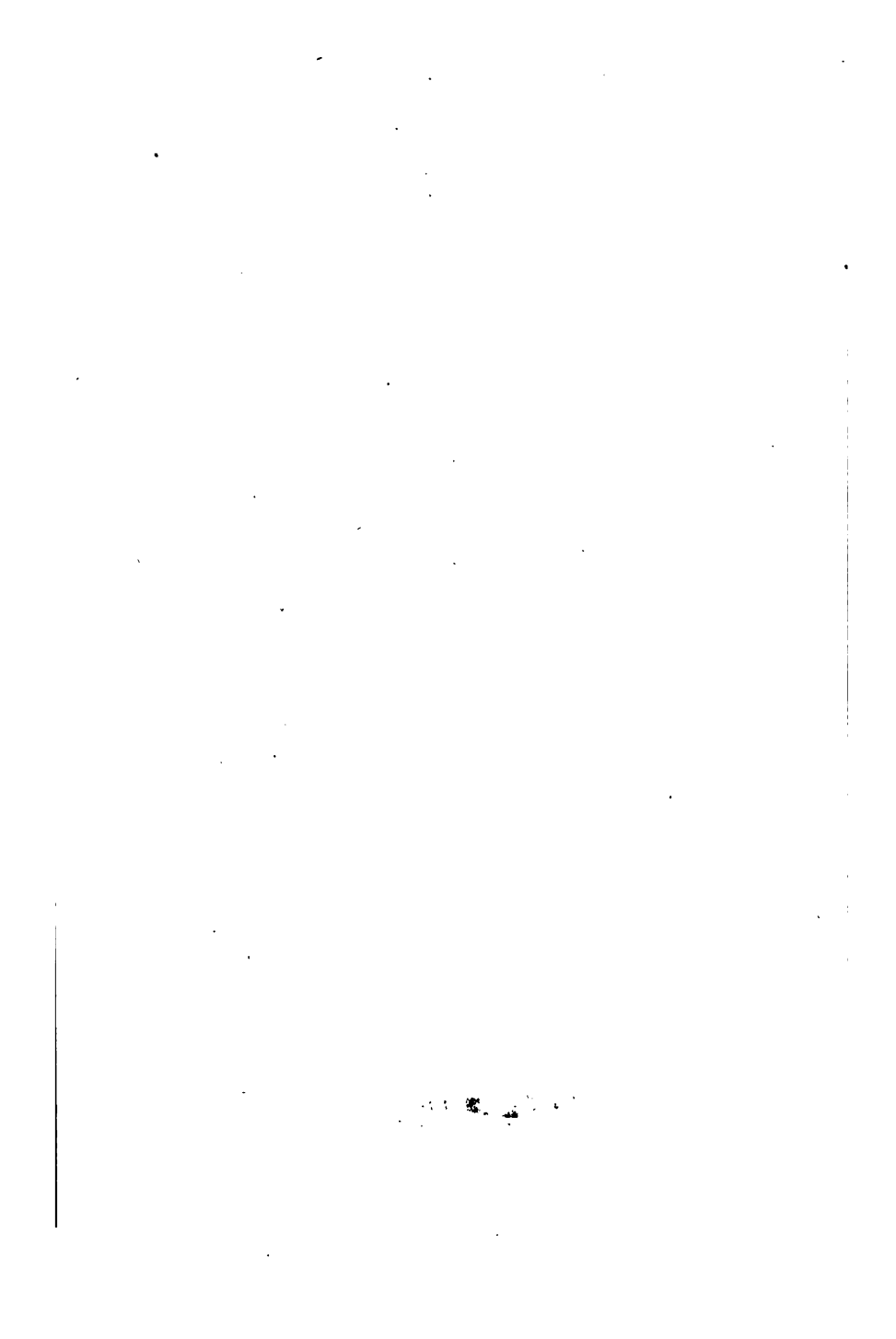
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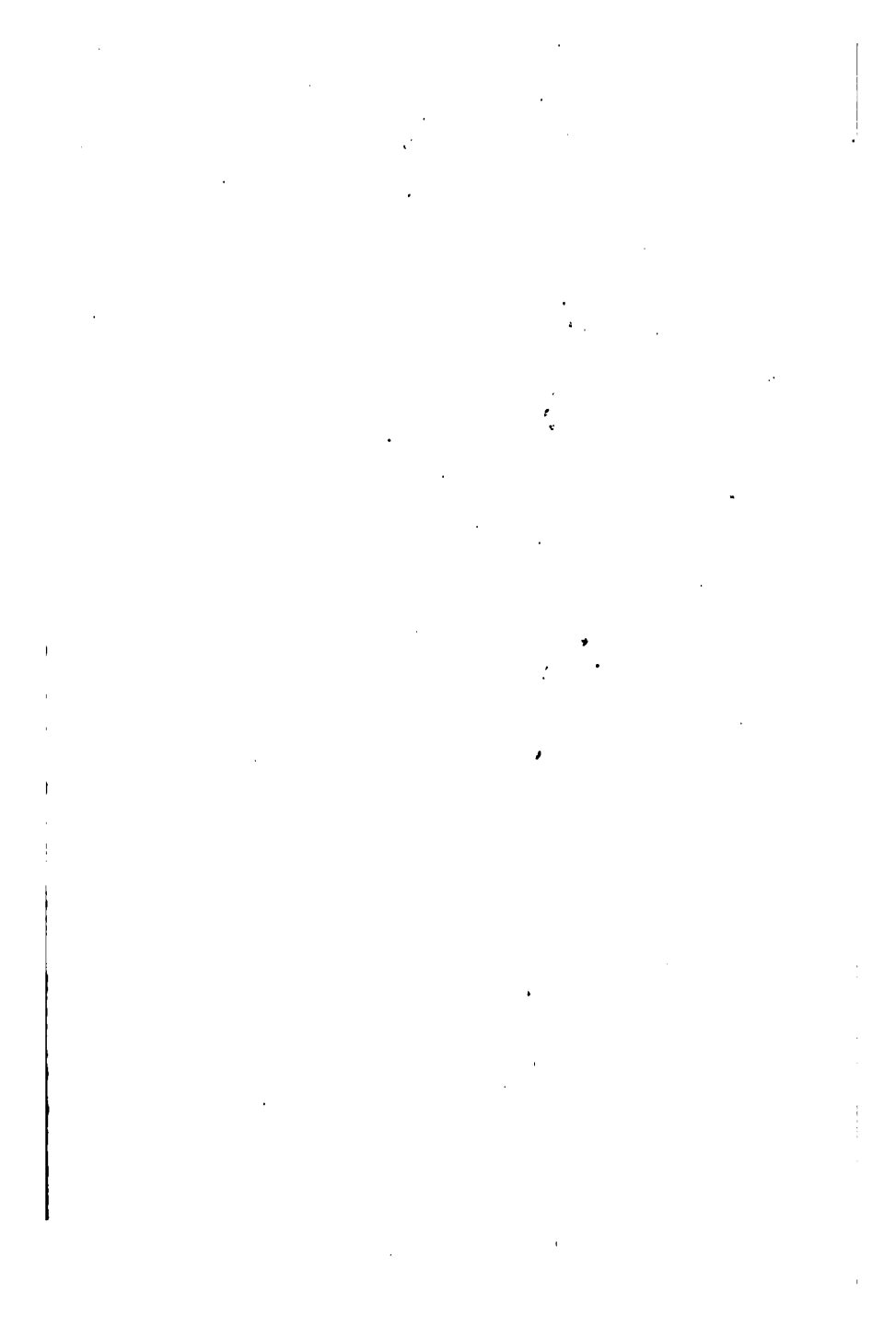
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LETTERS
TO
THE PERPLEXED





LETTERS TO THE PERPLEXED.



LETTERS
TO
THE PERPLEXED.

BY
REV. H. H. DOBNEY,
Author of "Judas;" "Free Churches;" "Vision of Redemption;"
&c., &c.

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TO THE READER.

TOWARDS the end of the year 1876, the Proprietor of the *Christian World* did me the honour to request that I would write in his paper a series of Letters to the Perplexed. The importance of endeavouring to render what help I could to so numerous, and, I fear, increasing a class—that has just now so great a claim on the best sympathies of those who, through storm and darkness, happily retain their own faith in God and Christ—and the immense circulation which the *Christian World* has obtained, made me not only willing, but glad and thankful even, to have such an opportunity afforded me. My Letters began with the year 1877, and, appearing at somewhat irregular intervals, were concluded in December. During their progress I was almost daily receiving communications from all parts of the country, entreating for help on almost all sorts of subjects. Many of these I replied to privately, others I kept in mind in the treatment of the topics touched on. To the request from many quarters that the Letters might appear as a volume, this little book is the response.

When I planned the present series, it was in my mind to follow it up with another, showing how thorough might be the satisfaction attained by a course of thought more purely philosophical. I believed one might begin with the vowel sound I, and from that pin-point build up a structure that would stand the rudest assault of storms and floods. But I soon convinced myself that such a

course would make far too great a demand on the readers of a weekly newspaper, and I abandoned it with the less reluctance as the same kind of work has been done by abler men, whom I can only admire at a distance. And I heartily commend any readers who desire light on this path to two works which it gives me pleasure thus to mention : "Philosophy Without Assumptions, by Thomas Penington Kirkman, M.A., F.R.S. ;" and "Behind the Veil : an Outline of Bible Metaphysics Compared with Ancient and Modern Thought, by Thomas Griffiths, A.M., Prebendary of St. Paul's." Both books published by Longmans, Green, and Co.

Since the Letters were finished, I have read "Christianity and Morality : the Boyle Lectures for 1874 and 1875, by Henry Wace, M.A. ;" and I take the liberty of adding this valuable book to the two others that I have recommended. And if I might add to these, and the two mentioned on pages 191 and 201, the late Canon Mozley's work on "Ruling Ideas in Bible Ages," any intelligent young man who shall accept my suggestion will have no mean library to begin with.

May the Spirit of Truth be ever guiding us more and more into all truth ; and, that it may be so, let us be assured, for our encouragement, that we are not straitened in Him, but only in ourselves !

Maidstone, April, 1878.

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LETTERS TO THE PERPLEXED.

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NO. I.

## *PRELIMINARY.*

IT can hardly be necessary to say that the above title must be understood much more restrictedly than its brevity might seem to imply. For it is, of course, only to *some* of the perplexed that the writer can pretend to address himself. Many of them he would have to pass on to abler and wiser helpers. So that it is desirable at once to intimate the class that it is thought (or, at least, hoped) may perhaps be somewhat benefited by the Letters which are here respectfully offered for their kindly acceptance.

It is no longer possible to us, even if we would, to close our eyes to the fact that there is more or less of very serious disturbance and unsettlement in all the schools of religious thought—say churches, if you will. Things which a few years ago no one who cared for religious truth and the religious life could have dreamed would ever be called in question, are now known by

everybody to be boldly and pèremptorily challenged ; and challenged, not merely by the scoffer, not merely by the frivolous and flippant—though, of course, there will be plenty of this class also to lend the aid of their most sweet voices—but by men in grim earnest to rid themselves and the world of whatever plausibilities have falsely passed hitherto for truths. Many a pernicious error—falsehood, they say—has long been masquerading in sacred vestments, and by virtue of false seeming has gained a credit and a power and a pretended prescriptive right which have been purely mischievous ; and it is time, they insist, that all that passes in the world or in the Church as religious truth should be challenged to produce satisfactory credentials. Whether or not, having found out that there is some spurious coin in circulation, it is necessary to test not only every sovereign, but also every threepenny-piece that may be tendered to us, let who will decide. However, I suppose that there is no man of any intellectual and moral robustness who can look back over a period of, say, twenty years, or even less, without seeing that he himself has in days gone by tenaciously held some things to be true, which he now sees it is well that he has given up for something better, that is truer. Such a one can understand, then, that a similar process may have been going forward in other minds, too, and with regard to matters which he himself may not yet have investigated very searchingly ; and, therefore, he ought scarcely to be surprised if some of those things he still fondly clings to, having been, whether wisely or not, unsparingly questioned by such other thinkers, have been by them abandoned for what they, too, deem more purely true. The process he has carried out on a small

scale they may have carried out on a much larger. And they may have pushed their bold investigations into matters that he had deemed too sacred and too sure to be ever touched. They may have not merely entered into the temple, but, with unwashed feet, into the holy place, and with bold hands pushed aside the veil, and searched into the ark in as common-place a way as they might handle a piece of furniture in a broker's shop. They may have found there no mercy-seat, no cherubim, and no glory, and have returned to announce that there is naught, that the Holy of Holies is empty, and that God is nowhere.

And thus, and in other ways, it has come to pass that the Christian who allows himself to know what is going forward in various circles of vigorous intellectual life, keeping abreast of the thought of the day, finds that he is interrupted and hindered in his devout enjoyment of whatever portion of religious truth he may at the time be pondering. Would he pray? He cannot but remember—though for the time how gladly would he forget!—what has been scientifically or philosophically urged, and with so much vaunt of conclusiveness, against this dearest instinct and habit of the spiritual life. Would he read the Scriptures, as alone with those whom he has been wont to call the inspired writers? To which of the books of either the Old or New Testament can he freely abandon himself without the haunting memory of the discussions raised by men as honest as himself, and quite possibly much better informed, as to its real authorship, and date, and genuineness, and so forth? He has of late heard so often that this text is an interpolation, and that is found in none of the best MSS., and the proper reading of

another is so different from what it has always been taken to be, that a disagreeable element of uncertainty seems mischievously thrown into his once happy mental home.

Sadder than all, where is the God of his fathers? the God of his own childhood? the God whom he prayed to so unquestioningly, and whom he thought he knew so well, a few years back? The dicta of this philosopher of acknowledged eminence or of that distinguished scientist, and confident assertions about The Absolute and The Unconditioned, and how self-revelation implies limitation, and therefore must not be predicated of The Infinite,—these things, I say, have been reported from the inner to the outer circles, till there is scarcely a young man who is familiar with our best periodicals but knows that even the deepest questions—questions involving the whole of religion—have to be faced by himself, and often in a solitude of soul that is almost like the savage wilderness into which even the Christ was driven by the forceful spirit within him.

And thus, beneath a surface that many try to believe and show to be smooth and unruffled, there is a disquiet, and a restlessness, and an apprehensiveness, and a cold, uncomfortable uneasiness and uncertainty as to what may or may not have to be given up, if not voluntarily, then forced from them unwillingly.

In this state of things, obvious to all who do not adopt the ostrich method of avoiding the sight of what it would be discomforting to recognise, different persons of course behave differently, according to their several temperaments or mental habitudes; in some cases, perhaps, according to their ecclesiastical, or theological, or even social position. Men of the world understand

this. Given, say, an Archbishop of Canterbury; and given also a sun-clear truth (*i.e.*, clear to every one whose mind is left free from all biasing circumstances, to move as freely as the needle to the pole) that would make the holding of the primacy untenable any longer to any man whose whole soul was loyal to Truth alone; what will happen? Or, for Archbishop of Canterbury, read President, or Theological Tutor, or any other high-placed man, in any other religious community, who is publicly committed to certain well-known tenets; for Church-of-England human nature and Wesleyan and Baptist human nature are probably pretty much alike. *Non quita movere* is a well-understood motto: No disturbing questions, gentlemen! for heaven's sake, none! So, in olden time, men built cities on the lovely slopes of sunny Italian hills, and though now and then ominous rumblings might be heard, yet who would be so ungracious as to hint at volcanic eruptions, and the possibility of a whole rejoicing city being overwhelmed and buried?

Others, however, are disquieted and sad. It seems to them, for the time, as if all was shifting sand, and there was solid rock nowhere. The well-worn question of Roman society in the days of Tiberius Cæsar, and which rose so naturally to the lips of P. Pilatus, has been wrung from them, and they put it with a weary sigh; but, lo! the words seem either to melt and die away in the infinite of air, or to be mockingly echoed back again for themselves to answer, What is Truth? They, too, like every other mortal that is worth his salt, are face to face with the dreaded Sphinx.

And of these some, it is to be feared, will give up the noble, if heart-wearing, pursuit altogether, and, like

Pliable and Obstinate, return to the City of Destruction (for we moderns have our City of Destruction, too, and quite possibly it is even a sadder one than that the inspired dreamer dreamt of).

Others of them will go on listlessly in the way they were going when these difficulties confronted them; they will keep up the same associations; engage, though with less and less of heart, in the same religious exercises and activities; and make no sign, except as now and then one of the initiated may detect it. While some, spurred, and stung, and quickened into keener life by the greatness of the issues and the glory of the prize—viz., a nearer beholding of the very face of Truth, which will surely be as the very face of God—come to a solemn understanding with their own souls, that, so help them God! they will in all things put Truth in the place of honour, and will let neither blame nor praise of men, nor social nor secular considerations, nor custom, nor prescription, nor any other thing, hinder them from loyalty to the Holy Power that has called them, even though they should have ever so long, and wearisome, and solitary a pilgrimage to the city which hath foundations; for that such city there must be, or the world is but a larger soap-bubble, and life a vanity, and God a dream.

If now the present writer can speak but a poor word or two that may be helpful to any who know of some things unsettling to their faith, and are vaguely fearful of more, he would esteem it a privilege to thank God for. One thing he can offer them, as he stretches to them a brother's hand—hearty sympathy. The Israelites were enjoined to be tenderly considerate to the stranger, "for," says Moses beautifully, "ye

know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." While even a heathen poet (as we sometimes strangely speak) makes Dido assign, as a reason and ability for succouring the unfortunate, that she herself was not ignorant of misfortune. So have I known what it is to be compelled to go over again every point of my earlier faith; to test every link of the chain that holds that anchor of the soul which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews pronounced to be sure and steadfast. The spectres of the mind have not refrained from haunting me in my hours of darkness, and I say that John Bunyan did not portray too fearfully what Christian had to encounter in the Valley of the Shadow of Death; and add my testimony to that of not a few, that spiritual distresses are far more wearing to brain and heart than physical suffering, or straitened circumstances. If it will gain me the more favourable ear of but one for whom I write, I will do violence to some of the soul's most secret and sacred memories even, and tell him (I write only for friends) that there are spots, never to be forgotten, which I have almost ventured to call Gethsemane. If to wallow on the floor of the locked chamber, in the anguish of the mental conflict; and to seek the distant downs, where no human being could see or hear, and cry aloud for help and guidance and light to Him that doth indeed so often hide himself; if thus to have known the strife, and, like Ajax, have longed for light, even if death brought it—if this can encourage any other perplexed seeker after Truth to persist unto the end, in the certainty that Truth will, sooner or later, most surely answer the cry of proved earnestness, why, then, I shall not regret having for the moment "worn.

my heart upon my sleeve." And if in the course of a forty years' ministry I have gained ever so little experience that may now serve a younger brother, I shall feel it a blessing to thank God for that I am permitted to offer it to him.

But let me add a word. I do not believe that the sympathy due to the honest perplexed is sympathy of the soft or sentimental kind. It should be masculine through and through. My brother, I have no girl's tears to weep over you. I do not pity you, as I do not, either now or in any retrospect, pity myself. Rather, I congratulate you that you are born into the world in so stirring a time. Thank God! the nineteenth century is alive; alive to the tips of the fingers. It is a glorious age to be living in. What if it abound in severe duties, if mind and heart are exposed to a terrible strain, if we have to gird up the loins of our mind, and wear our armour, not for show but use, and to keep it free from rust and bright by letting the blows fall thick on it where they may. Did I dare but now to use the word Gethsemane? The Captain of God's chivalry pardon me! But do you think that even he ever regretted that midnight hour beneath the grey olive trees, when once it was over? No; it is to him that overcometh that the sevenfold promise is made; and even a writer of our own has said, "The joy of conquest is the joy of man."

## NO. II.

### *DOUBT: HONEST AND OTHERWISE.*

WHOEVER has had to come under the hands of a surgeon has probably been struck, and rather disagreeably, perhaps, by the perfect coolness and leisureliness of the gentleman to whose skill he was so eagerly looking for the longed-for relief. While you, in your agony, feel a minute to be as an hour, he is as deliberate in his movements as if you were lying on a bed of roses; and you are almost indignant to see him even looking at the pictures in the room, and hear him asking questions and making remarks so irrelevant that they seem to imply there is no cause whatever for haste or anxiety, and that all will go thoroughly well, as a matter of course. Afterwards you came to understand the practical philosophy of his bearing, and perceived that it had no small share in producing that more favourable state of your own mind which was not a little conducive to the ultimate favourable result. So, almost the first words I would speak to some of my friends, at present full of painful disquietude on even the gravest of religious questions, would be to suggest quietness of spirit.

There is really no cause for alarm or perturbation. You are for the time in darkness, but light has not,

therefore, ceased to be. There is perfect day somewhere. Granted that all about you is mist, vapour, cold fog ; but a brisk wind may presently arise (sooner or later, no doubt, will), and dispel it. And, meanwhile, you may take a disinterested satisfaction in the certainty that there is many a sunny mead, and many a breezy down, where the air is clear, and the sky above is calm and bright. The whole world is not abandoned to darkness and chaos because at present all is confusion and perplexity with you. Just as there are myriads of happy children rejoicing in their free childhood, and multitudes of youths and maidens to whom life is a glorious boon, and strong-hearted men, not a few, exulting in having all their powers called forth to the uttermost by the demands made on their intellectual manhood, so, also, there are numbers of men and women who are rejoicing in assured religious truth.

In some of your moods, I know, it seems as if everything was unsettled, nothing sure, and all the foundations of the world out of course. And the taunt which was addressed to the Psalmist repeats itself—If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? To which the proper answer is, The foundations CANNOT be destroyed. Give back that rejoinder, promptly and boldly. Look! the night heavens are very calm; the stars keep their places. Let the grand and holy midnight sky—for God is in it, though you may know it not—shed its stillness and peace into your agitated heart.

Possibly, you are too much to yourself, fill too large a space in your own eyes—unconsciously, no doubt, but perhaps very really, feel as if you were pretty nearly the centre of all things, so that things must be as they seem

to you. Realise, rather, that you are but an infinitesimal fraction of the whole, and try, now and then, at least, to lose yourself for a time in the whole. This self of ours, and which, therefore, is not our very selves, may be too morbidly enlarged and inflamed and all-engrossing ; and a swollen individualism is often at the root of a good deal of our discomfort. Believe in God—if only by way of experiment, and for a moment—with all perplexing questions imperially commanded for a time into silence ; believe, I mean, in One worthy to be God, the Best conceivable, all that a God ought to be ; then remember how such a One has all time and all resources at his command ; that he must necessarily be working on a vast scale ; and then believe that you, as a living part of one living whole, are necessarily cared for and included in his all-perfect plan. The experiment is at least a pleasant one, and quite within our power ; and I should not wonder if, in the temporary belief, the idea became as light, which evidences itself, and needs no proof but itself that it is light.

But to proceed on the line from which I have allowed myself for a moment to diverge. Do not let conscience be at all uneasy under the undefined fear that there is something wrong in the doubt which, nevertheless, you find inevitable. How do you know whence the doubt proceeds ? Till you have thoroughly investigated it, how can you be sure its source is evil, and that its issue must be bad ? Some doubts, at all events, are wise and good. And so far from being wrong in your case, it may be your bounden duty to doubt. The doubt may be indispensable to a clearer and larger apprehension of the truth eventually. If a Hindoo, under Christian influence, began to doubt of

his hereditary gods, would that be bad? distressing it might be, for a time, but bad? If a Mahometan, having heedfully observed some "infidel" (for Christians are the infidels in Mahometan countries) who lived a lovelier life than he had ever before witnessed, should begin to doubt whether the Koran after all was as good as the New Testament, would not multitudes of Christians applaud and encourage him to doubt still further? If a Roman Catholic doubted of the infallibility of the Pope and of his real successorship to St. Peter, would not Protestants regard his doubts as a promise of good? If a Unitarian began to doubt whether, in his creed, our Lord Jesus Christ held quite the place which he held in the minds of the apostles Paul and John, how many of the orthodox would tell him doubt was a bad thing? If a Dissenter began to doubt whether he was right in separating himself from the Established Church, what clergyman would discourage and blame such doubt as that? or, *vice versâ*, if a clergyman avowed to a Nonconformist minister that he was beginning to doubt of the Athanasian Creed, and some of the Thirty-nine Articles, and of the ability of the bishops to confer the Holy Ghost and the power to forgive sins, and even whether the Church could be fully loyal to her Lord while the creature of the State, would not his Nonconformist brother try to make him doubt still more? And so on, and so on. There is no doubt but will be applauded by some, and be blamed by others.

Evidently, a great deal of doubt is most legitimate. It looks as if almost all ecclesiastical or doctrinal reformation began with doubt as to the truth of what had been hitherto unquestioned. If Huss, and Luther, and Wycliff, and others had not ventured to doubt of

Papal decrees, &c., we might all of us have been to-day as dark and priest-ridden as any Spanish devotee. Surely, to see thus clearly that doubt of things heretofore held to be certain truth has been a mighty factor in the progress of man towards something better—whose best may quite possibly not have been reached even yet—may serve to dispel some misgivings, and to make us calm and not unconfident, even while we suffer the pain of suspense on matters in which we want certainty. And so we are prepared to understand the stress which Bacon and others lay on learning to doubt wisely.

That word “wisely” I must return to by-and-by, but at present must proceed in the direction I am pursuing ; and so beg to remind you, further, that the painful perplexity which distresses so many in our day is no new thing. So far from it, we may safely say that it is found in all the ages that have not been characterised by stagnancy of intellectual and religious life. Evidently the great Father does not object to his children having their minds not only seriously, but sometimes even painfully, exercised. Look, even when Jesus the Christ was here in person, was not every synagogue, every social circle, every household, thrown into greatest perplexity? They could not, ought not to, surrender themselves to every one who came forward as their Messiah. They must judge of his claims. The real question, which some, however, failed to see, was as to *the proper tests*. And very naturally the greater number took for granted that their own ready-made tests were the true ones ; whereas, most unfortunately for them, it was quite otherwise. Unhappily for them, they did not doubt the correctness of their own general principles,

or of their interpretation of the texts they quoted from the Scriptures to disprove the Messiahship of Jesus. Ah! had they only dared to doubt wisely, they might have believed gloriously. But, you see, they took for granted—as it is so natural to do, and so pleasant, and saves so much trouble—that the orthodox interpretation was unquestionable. Thus, they had their Fourth Commandment, their law of the Sabbath-day. It never occurred to them to ask themselves whether they rightly understood it. Why, of course they did; how could all the great doctors be mistaken? Besides, had they not received it by tradition from the fathers? So they unhesitatingly decided that Jesus was not of God, because he kept not the Sabbath. So they had from Moses a law of blasphemy, which law they applied to Christ, without asking any second question, after he had himself avowed certain things. The unhappy men doubted neither their own infallibility (so few of us do), nor the soundness of the authorised interpretation of their Scriptures. And unless they could have doubted, belief was impossible. Misgivings as to what all the great authorities laid down, and almost everybody believed, would have left space for the credentials of Christ to show themselves. But by force of their *a priori* reasonings there was no chance for them to see *him* as he was. He was prejudiced in their eyes from the beginning. So with their law of social morals; because he ate and drank with those whom they, unhappily, made it a part of their religion to despise, they again easily decided that he could not be from God. If they could have doubted of the righteousness of their social law, they would not have condemned the Holy One.

But even many who, perhaps, sincerely wished to know the truth—or thought they did—concerning this new prophet from Galilee, were in a state of chronic perplexity, because he did not afford them certain signs which they arbitrarily, and very unwisely, determined to be necessary. “How long dost thou make us to doubt?” they querulously demanded, whereas Christ did not make them doubt; the whole cause of doubt was in themselves.

Plainly, then, there are doubts and doubts; doubts which it is wise to cherish, and doubts which spring out of something wrong in ourselves, or out of things already in usurped possession of our minds, which prejudice the truth when presented to us. And even where there is as much honesty of purpose as may be, there must still often be suspense and uncertainty touching some things, touching many things, indeed. For truth is so vast, and all the separate truths—whose whole makes truth—are so vitally connected, and there is such a law of order running through them, and binding them into unity, that unless we remember this, and are content to begin with the nearest and proceed gradually, all ere long may well be confusion in our minds, and confusion means uncertainty. How often have persons come to me in perplexity about this and the other thing, which they were as yet incapacitated for understanding, simply because they had not mastered the truths which come before; as if a boy not yet apt at multiplication should have turned over the pages of his arithmetic, and tried to master vulgar fractions, and be out of heart, because he could not make head or tail of them. So a child asks questions which, though they can be answered to grown-up

people, cannot possibly be answered to a child. The child must be content to wait, and know hereafter. But we, we cannot wait; suspense, uncertainty, ignorance, is uncomfortable; we would rather dash at a conclusion, have some fixed opinion, anyhow; we dislike to say, "I don't know," and so take up prematurely with the ready-made judgments of this or that party, whose recruiting sergeants are always out with their bounty-money and ribbons. And then, by-and-by, comes some one or something, which makes our fond notions wear another look, and disagreeable doubts are insinuated; and when this same process has gone on a few times, then we get thoroughly uncomfortable, and feel as if the whole of our faith was being weighed in the balances and found wanting. Whereas, had we proceeded more wisely, been content with elementary truths at the beginning, and gone on heedfully from the nearer (or lower) to the higher, instead of giving in our adhesion, while yet young, to doctrines on which we were not competent to have an opinion, we might have been spared much after-growth of doubt and discomfort. Sectarian teachers—I do not use this word to designate teachers outside the Church of England, for there is as much sectarianism within as without; nay, the Church of England is but one sect of many—are answerable for much of that perplexity of the present day which now they bewail. They often put their own crude hypotheses forward as truth, without discriminating between a fact and their own explanation of it, so that the discovery by-and-by that their theory was untenable made the unwary believe that the fact itself was untenable. The Church has occupied more ground than she could maintain, has

arrogantly taken up positions which have to be abandoned ; and this being perceived, the impression gets abroad that she is on the point of being defeated along the whole line. The Church is answerable for a large measure of the perplexity and uncertainty that characterises this last half of the nineteenth century, pretty much as the state of the higher Romish clergy in France provoked the infidelity of the Voltaire period. Here, with us, it was not so much the moral quality of the lives as the moral quality of much that was forced on us as truth, and which we must adopt on penalty of being stigmatised as infidel, that by-and-by provoked a revolt which was likely enough at first to proceed farther than was necessary.

Hence, the man in whom doubt has begun to work, needs to be on his guard against a too-sweeping scepticism, and to ask himself whether there may not quite possibly be some most precious truths concealed under an intellectual form whose crudity has at last offended him. If he be familiar with philosophical terms he will say to himself, if wise, that he must distinguish between *ideas* and *conceptions*, recognising the evanescence of *these*, while *those* are abiding.

But I verily think there would, for a time, be even more perplexity than there is, though eventually less, if there were more thinking, and more thorough-going honesty in thinking. In the Thirty-nine Articles, for example, they say there are some six hundred distinct propositions ; I have not made the experiment of counting, but can quite believe it. Well, if young men were as honest as we expect maidens to be pure, would they consent at three-and-twenty to sign those Articles *ex animo* ? Or, if they really thought and allowed them-

selves to think thoroughly, could they kneel before a bishop to receive the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins? What is the spirit that can be so bestowed? A person? an influence? or what? So, in some of our Nonconformist colleges, is not a pretty tough doctrinal system either expected to be subscribed, or else assumed to be adopted, by the commencing student? Whence, in after days, comes often a state of mind to be commiserated. What would Socrates have said to a young man's *beginning* with the avowal of such clear-cut doctrines as a *sine quâ non* to the culture he was seeking? Which reminds me (though I must ask pardon for the digression) that, in my humble judgment, founded on what I know, it would be a most happy thing for our young candidates for the ministry, if their theological tutors could be among them as Socrates was with the young men of Athens, whom he set himself to teach and influence, questioning them *and letting them question him*. In a day like this, when free thought penetrates into all our schools of the prophets, formal lectures prepared several years ago, however excellent, cannot supply the profound want which, to my personal knowledge, exists among many of the student class. A living, face-to-face, mind-to-mind, and heart-to-heart relation between teacher and taught, is what is wanted; such as subsisted between Socrates and his pupils, and between a greater than Socrates and his disciples intended for apostles. "When they were in the house, they asked Jesus privately of his teaching." Alas! for the young men in some of our colleges, if they asked their revered Gamaliels any such questions as would lead to a suspicion that they were entertaining any doubt on the agreed-on doctrines. Whence, instead

of the openness, the ingenuousness, so precious, ay, and so indispensable, there is begotten a reticence, a prudence, which might be all very well if they were by-and-by to be preachers of a "doctrine of reserve."

But I must break off this Letter abruptly, for it is too long already. And yet I am loth to end it without a word of another complexion, too. Let me, then, urge on all who have begun to feel themselves perplexed, thorough honesty with themselves, and no dishonesty with those they have to do with. My friend, you must not say you cannot afford to be honest. Afford it you must, or it is all over with you. I was going to say, You must be honest, or be —. But, if honest, then be sure that, behind all your perplexity, is One whose designs for you are worthy of himself. Do not fear to draw near, like Moses, even "to the thick darkness," for God is there. It is He who, unknown to you, is stirring up, like an eagle, your nest, that you may ere long find a nobler, truer life. Perplexity may be at the beginning, but it shall not be the end. Out of the night is born the morning, and chaos comes before the kosmos. Who would say, as the witty Frenchman represents some as saying, "Oh, God, let us conserve chaos!"

### NO. III.

#### *WISE AND UNWISE DOUBTING.*

ANY one suffering from mental uneasiness, any one, *i.e.*, classing himself among those to whom these Letters are addressed, may well be excused for wishing the writer to make haste to "come to the point," meaning, of course, what he, the perplexed one, considers the point. May God enable me, sooner or later, to say some word to that "weary" one in particular, but it does not quite fall in with my plan to hurry over what such a one may possibly deem needless preliminary considerations.

There is no very speedy cure for such perplexities as these Letters contemplate. And often it is but little that another can do to help one who has begun to hear the scarcely recognised voice of Truth, and is enlisted for the noble if arduous service. God will lead and teach him, if only he will be faithful and obedient. I must be allowed, as the Latin saying is, to hasten slowly.

One friend lingered over that point in the last Letter about "Doubting Wisely," and begged me to return to it; and, quite sure that there is such a thing as *unwise doubting*, I do not quite like to pass it by. It may save the necessity, too, for digression by-and-by, when

I come on to speak more directly about God, and Christ, and the Scriptures, and how a consistent structure may, I think, be reared from sure foundations.

He, then, is not doubting wisely, for one, who loves doubting better than believing. Yet have I known more than a few who gave me the inevitable impression that this was their case. I have known those who were eager to read all that clever men could write against Christianity, against Theism even, and yet who would not get the books which equally competent men—often, indeed, more competent—wrote in reply. The last advertisement I noticed of “Supernatural Religion” announced the sixth edition, so that it has had a large sale. I wonder how many who eagerly welcomed it have been as earnest to buy and read the masterly replies by Canon Lightfoot and others? An acute and clever young fellow of twenty once asked me to lend him such and such a book, naming one I may be excused for not mentioning, which was written to undermine the foundations of Christianity. The book could not be read without almost certain injury to any one who was not prepared, by previous culture, to see where its subtle errors began. I told him as much, and, having inquired about his previous reading, asked him if he thought it wise, at his age, to begin his reading on such subjects with a course of cleverly-urged sceptical objections, which, to him, must inevitably look more than plausible, whatever they might seem to me. He got the book elsewhere, however, and gradually, by such exclusive reading, built himself up into an accomplished unbeliever. Did he, think you, practise wise, or most unwise, doubting? I have read of men in days gone by, who, knowing that they would cer-

tainly be subjected to the action of subtle poison, took the precaution beforehand of dosing themselves with the proper antidote. But for persons unprepared to cope (without danger to themselves) with ingenious and often seemingly unanswerable objections to the contents of the New Testament, and to do this without any call of duty, and quite wantonly and lightly, is it a healthy sign, and one we should like to see in son or daughter?

Neither does he doubt wisely who, though stopping short of the class just referred to, allows doubt to get ahead of belief; who does not, in fact, make believing his object, using the power and right of doubting only to preserve him against premature, and crude, and false conclusions. The truth-loving man will read, and search, and think—and, let me add, pray, as Socrates prayed for light—with the view to build, and enlarge, and beautify such a home for his soul as we are reminded of by the words of Solomon: "Every wise woman buildeth her house, but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands;" and "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out the seven pillars." I believe in that palace-home of Wisdom, with its seven pillars. But what home for the soul will the mere habit of doubting—and especially of doubting for doubting sake—ever build, and what would be the pillars thereof?

I have known the habit of doubting so indulged in and cherished, that, at last, the victim of it (I can use no other term), as if instinctively, always looked at once, and eagerly, for the difficulties and objections that could anyhow be found against whatever was propounded for belief, no matter with what venerable or even holy

associations and recommendations it might come before him. Ultimately, such a habit leaves a man with a great power for doubting—ay, and a keen appetite for it, too, and a most attenuated capacity for believing. This has an analogy in the world, in the man who, considering himself shrewdest of the shrewd, flatters himself that he shows his thorough “knowledge of the world” by regarding every man as a rogue. There are that cannot believe in the disinterestedness or out-and-out integrity of any man, or the real purity of any woman. Not desirable companions; not the men that friends are made of; but still, in certain circles, to be found by the score. Just so appear to me the men who have eagerly cherished suspicion of everything pertaining to religion, and who show off their fine critical acumen, and their great intellectual superiority to us common mortals, by the dogmatism of their sweeping denials. But the soul of man is not nourished by mere denials, cannot live on negations. As well might a man think to sustain his bodily life by merely analysing all the food that came before him. To test your bread, &c., from time to time, may be needful, but in the name of common-sense don’t be everlastingly testing; get some good wholesome food, somewhere, at all events; or else you may as well at once engage nurse and doctor, and even look out your grave, and arrange with the undertaker. So I see men spiritually waning, and pining, and growing paler and feebler, and ready to give up the ghost—ay, ghosts already—all for lack of those positive truths which others find to abound in all the elements of highest life.

And, not unfrequently, this habit of doubting for doubting sake, and for the supposed cleverness of it,

and which a man may pride himself upon for a time, leaves him at last in a state which becomes unbearable to himself. The inevitable years bring their melancholy changes; he is not so young as he was, has not the same buoyancy or vigour; friends are fewer; he is getting to be left behind; he is solitary, and is thrown more in upon himself, and finds there little to sustain him, and alas! nothing to gladden or inspire him. Then the craving of the soul for the positive, which belongs to man as an original appetite, if I may say so, puts him, though he may not like to acknowledge it, out of conceit with all his life-long cherished scepticism, and he secretly envies the believer, envies even the credulous, whose credulity has, at all events, ministered to their peace of some kind. In this mood, the pretensions of a Church and a priesthood professing certainty, infallibility even, become secretly attractive, and if his surroundings do not prevent, he may not improbably end his career of too much pride in falsely called freedom of thought by kneeling servilely at the feet of the priest, and surrendering into the hands of "the Church" all right to call even his conscience his own. This has happened over and over again. This is what happened to the young fellow above referred to. The last time I heard of him he was weary of the long and harassing search after truth by the system of suspicion and denial, and was enamoured of the certainty which Rome vaunts herself the possessor of. Extremes beget extremes, ultra-Romanism begets scepticism, and, again, scepticism yields weary votaries to Rome.

There is also too much reason to fear that in some cases a very poor kind of pride—though what form

of pride is not poor?—may, albeit unconsciously, be at the bottom of a good deal of freely-indulged doubt and denial. There is such a thing as intellectual scorn; and, just as the vulgar rich may toss the head in disdain of social “inferiors,” “the common people,” so certain minds may choose to be superior to believing things held by people who can form no conception of the scientific or philosophic altitudes where they sit as princes of the world of thought. Shall *they* believe anything in common with the Philistine crowd of church-and-chapel goers? This, indeed, may be the extreme and virulent form of the disease, but the same devitalising malady in its elementary stage has touched not a few. Many a young man thinks it a fine thing to intimate his emancipation from “all that the nurse and all the priest hath taught,” and foolishly fancies himself, too, a thinker when he says, “I think with So-and-so.” I have seen not a little of this paltry kind of unbelief, and wish, with all the earnestness I can, to warn young men especially against one of the most mischievous forms of falsehood that I know. Yes, deliberately do I write that word—falsehood; for is not this state of mind an utterly false one? Can there be “truth in the inward parts,” when a lurking wish is allowed, and even indulged, to disbelieve what others believe, for the sake of seeming superiority, and being able to plume one’s self on one’s cleverness? The conceit which comes so easy to us all, and which in young men has not yet had time to be scourged out of them by the providential discipline of life, lies at the bottom of not a little of the scepticism I have met with. And in such cases, I do not know of any argument whatever that will convince the sceptic of the truth that he thinks

it so fine to refuse and argue against. It is not an intellectual remedy, applied from without, that he needs. In his present mood he is not convinceable. If Truth herself in all her majesty could be presented before him, he would pride himself on his sagacity in detecting at a glance that she was a cheat. It is a moral and spiritual cure that such a one needs. He is blind, and unhappily fancies that he sees. But, some may say, such as these scarcely come under the head of "The Perplexed," for whom these Letters are intended. True; but they often lead their unsuspecting companions into a frightful perplexity, and I wish to counsel the ingenuous and trustful not to allow themselves to be unduly disturbed in their holiest convictions by aught that can be urged by any who show themselves conceited, flippant, irreverent. Let them rather listen only to the wise.

Again, some are led into doubt through a secret longing for a kind of freedom which religious truth would most certainly veto. Not a few mistake licence for freedom. They misuse that noble name. Now if any young man (removed probably from his father's home and his mother's eye) wants to live away from the restraints of a good conscience, the subtle reasonings—or perhaps not even subtle, only foolish—of certain confident, and apparently high-spirited and hilarious, companions will, because they are not unwelcome, seem to "have something in them," to be "worth looking at," and as in such cases it is a thousand to one but that all the pop-gun artillery will be played against mere caricatures of the truth, or the opinions of the least intelligent "professors of religion," or the

defective lives of certain "Christians," the voluble talker needs not be much of a thinker. There may be a complete diarrhœa of garrulity (*fluxe de bouche*) on such topics, and the clever fellow of the circle may carry all before him, and yet his poor head may never have ached for an hour in consequence of any hard thinking or noble reading. The unbelief that is, however unconsciously, fed by the secret dislike to come at once under the eye and the guidance of such a Master of true life as Christ, is not amenable to argument. And I refer to this class—surely not uncommon wherever young men are by circumstances thrown together—only for the sake of putting some for whom I write on their guard, and counselling them not to suffer themselves to be moved by any who can either mock at holy things, or take a pleasure in discovering flaws in the characters of religious people, or treat even the great questions of religion with levity. Surely all such must be peremptorily excluded from the category of those who "doubt wisely."

I counsel the perplexed, then, at once to look well to the cause and origin of their perplexity. Let them search their own hearts, and that in the clearest light they know of. Is there any secret thing that will not bear the light? For he that doeth truth cometh to the light that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God; but every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. Is there any poor, unworthy motive operating to make doubt not unwelcome? What is the character of their companions? From what kind of men have they learned their misgivings?

“None

But such as are good men can give good things ;  
And that which is not good is not delicious  
To a well-governed and wise appetite.”

I have freely admitted that 'often doubt is a duty ; that, in the course of the centuries, the Truth may have gathered some ugly accretions, which it is well to yield to an unsophisticated conscience in suspecting. But doubts of this kind will grow stronger in the divinest light in which they can be set. Would the doubts of my friends, if largely indulged, tend to make God more glorious in the eyes of men ? to quicken the conscience, and arouse the soul, and purify, and strengthen, and elevate the life ? Or the reverse of all this ? Is it in our best moods, or in our poorest, that they come with most force ?

And, meanwhile, till the Father of Lights (oh, blessed name !) send a clearer ray of his own light into your perplexed minds—(and remember, He is never in a hurry ; you may ultimately be none the worse, but all the better, for having known the conflict, the bitter strife, the darkness that makes the cheek wan and pale) —what shall you do ? Be faithful to what light you have ; do not obtrude your difficulties, while as yet you can speak no helping word, on others who are still free from disquietude ; but at the same time do not pretend to hold anything you do not believe,—for your life, not this !—wear no mask ; be guilty of no insincerity ; do all the good you can, of whatever kind ; love the duty that comes next to hand, and keep your whole mind and heart open to whatever light may quietly come. For God is Light, and into the soul whose windows are

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not darkened from within, He is ever sending, though generally in the softest, simplest way, so that some do not recognise it as light, one little illuminating ray after another, till, by-and-by, lo! we are conscious that light has been coming, though, like Jacob, we "knew it not."

#### NO. IV.

### *ON CERTAINTY WITH RESPECT TO RELIGIOUS TRUTH.*

NOT a little perplexity has often been occasioned in some minds by the modern dogma that nothing is to be believed unless it can be "verified," and by learning that some things, perhaps many, which they had thought beyond all question, are not so "absolutely certain" as had been assumed. On these kindred subjects, then, of certainty and verification, it may be desirable to dwell. And, first, for the former, which is all that can be touched on in the present Letter.

If we were to ask, What things may confidently be pronounced certain? no doubt everybody would readily mention some. And if we were to go on to ask, How many things within the sphere of our own personal knowledge could we reckon up of whose certainty we could entertain no question? I have as little doubt that a goodly number might very soon be easily enumerated.

One would mention the multiplication-table, another the axioms found on the first page of "Euclid," a third would repeat a few of the simpler mathematical pro-

positions, a fourth would name several historical events, a fifth might say "seeing is believing," &c. And there would soon be an immense number of things that everybody took to be certain. But if, when we had got, say, a hundred, we were further to ask, How do you know the certainty of all these things? we should meet with a far less ready response; and, on continuing our inquiries, we should gradually find that we might with advantage introduce the principle of classification. For we should discover that we came to know, what we considered, the certainty of some things by a different method or in a different way from that by which we arrived at the sense of certainty in regard to others. Thus let me ask these questions:—How are you certain that sugar is sweet? that a part is less than the whole? that the world is round? that it is the earth moves round the sun, and not the sun round the earth, as our sense of sight so confidently affirms? that Julius Cæsar invaded Britain, and was afterwards assassinated in the Forum? that Milton wrote "*Paradise Lost*," and Shakespeare the plays that bear his name? that you are the same person you were twenty years ago? that a certain act was noble, praiseworthy? that right is right for ever more? that honesty is the best policy? that truth is better than falsehood, now and for ever? that the rainbow is lovely? that Grace Darling and Florence Nightingale are noble women? that you were born on what you call your birthday? that Wordsworth's "*Ode on Immortality*" is a fine poem? that a certain oratorio is grand, or a certain sonata sweet? that Demosthenes, Cicero, and Chatham were true orators? that Queen Victoria, or her legitimate heir, will wear the Crown of Great Britain a year hence? that England

will be in existence this time twelve months? or, that the sun will rise to-morrow? or —

You will cry to me, "Stop! I want to think;" and, indeed, there is demand for thought, and if we were to go thoroughly into these things we should find we needed to think pretty vigorously and closely. But, of course, I can here only skim the surface of the matter. You perceive, however, in an instant, that the path by which you arrive at certainty on these questions is not the same in all cases. And you will also detect that the word *certainty* can be used respecting some of them only in a somewhat looser manner than in others—not strictly. For example, can you be as certain that Julius Cæsar invaded Britain as you are that (to you, at least) sugar is sweet? You will say that you know this last of your own personal knowledge, directly, by the sense of taste, while you know about Julius Cæsar only by general historic consent.

Very good, there is a difference, then, you observe. Now as to the sun's rising to-morrow; have you any doubt about it? None. Has any single individual, of all the fourteen hundred millions of human beings now alive on this earth, any doubt, think you? I should think not one. Is it perfectly, absolutely certain that the sun will rise to-morrow? Why, no, you say, not if you press the word certainty in its strictest, rigidest sense. Yet you have no doubt about it? Not the least. Nor anybody else that you know of? No one. You mean, then, that, though not absolutely certain, it is probable? Yes, and probable in the highest degree; not certain, but for all practical purposes, as good as certain. So, then, a very high degree of probability is what we must be content with in this case? Yes.

Probably, then, in many other cases as well? I should say so. And so should I.

Can men of great judgment and experience, who embark considerable capital in some mercantile undertaking about which they have taken the utmost pains possible, be absolutely certain that they will not lose it all? They cannot. And I suppose, in nearly all business transactions, there is some element of risk, of uncertainty, however small? Undoubtedly. And nearly all transactions would cease among men if they were not content often to act on probabilities? Yes, for the most part, it is a question of more or less probable. And, always, a very high degree of probability, instead of absolute certainty, is held to justify wise men in believing, and trusting, and acting? It is, universally. Thank you; you have answered my questions well and truly; and now I trust you are prepared to face some of the questions about religious truth with advantage. I do not say that on some of them we have not certainty even; but if we have more or less probability, and often the highest possible degree of probability, short of absolute certainty, neither philosophers nor men of the world are entitled to curl the lip or shrug the shoulder either at our believing or our acting on our belief. No, nor may the men of science either; for the æther, or finer somewhat than air, which they cannot get on at all without, wanting it for their theory of light and sound, &c., have they ever been able to detect it yet, to lay their finger on it, or test it? or does it continue to this day but an inference, a something that they find themselves obliged to assume, because they cannot do without it? Is it anything more than a working hypothesis? Then, if in some

matters of religion, I, too, should find myself compelled to believe and act on some things I cannot absolutely "prove," but which I find necessary, and find also most satisfactory as "a working hypothesis," can the most eminent of our scientific doctors refuse to acknowledge me as a brother? Do we not sail in the same boat?

It is of great importance that those for whom these letters are intended should very distinctly recognise and stamp indelibly on their minds these two things:—First, that often probability, rather than certainty, is all that can fairly be demanded, and that, too, in matters of vast moment; and, secondly, that whether we speak of certainty or of that measure of probability which is often somewhat loosely called certainty, we get our feeling of confidence in different ways. I remember once sitting with a Jewish rabbi and his daughter in his booth at the Feast of Tabernacles, when the conversation gradually became a discussion, in the course of which I foolishly said, of something I had asserted, that it was as certain as that my stick was black. "Prove that the stick is black," said he in an instant. Of course, I had to confess the *lapsus* into which I had been betrayed [it was over thirty years ago], and that I could not prove the stick was black. Now, will the reader just note this: Every man, woman, and child throughout all England would affirm confidently that the stick was black; but not one of them all could prove it. The fact is, we rightly believe, and cannot help believing, too, many things that we cannot prove. So that when, respecting some precious truth, we are peremptorily required to prove the truth of what we believe, we shall not be at all disconcerted, but shall

want to see, first, whether in this case proof is rightly demanded ; then, whether absolute certainty is to be looked for, or only such a degree of probability as men act on in their temporal affairs ; and, thirdly, by which of the several processes through which we attain to satisfaction is it to be sought in this instance. For often confusion has been caused simply by the attempted application, to one branch of things, of evidence only appropriate to a very different kind.

Everybody has smiled at the mathematician who, on hearing "*Paradise Lost*" praised, asked, "What does it prove?" and at Sterne's critic, who tested the merit of a painting by a two-foot rule, and of an actor by his stop-watch. These, however, are only ludicrous illustrations of a not uncommon habit—viz., that of applying a test, or demanding a kind of proof, that the case does not admit of. Thus, a little while since, the religious press had to point out the absurdity of a proposed test as to the utility of prayer. Not in more utter ignorance of the whole matter do others demand, in order to their believing any of the miracles recorded in the Scriptures, that a miracle should be wrought now, before their eyes, and not only so, but on such and such conditions. No one who believes those records has any such idea of miracles as would leave room for such a demand. The theory of miracles is not open to such a test, any more than Sir Walter Scott's Crusader was bound to convert water into ice under a Syrian sun, under penalty of being held a liar by Saladin. There are mathematical tests, and logical, and historical, and mechanical, and chemical, and moral, and experiential and others ; and the thing is not to confuse them. Yet often no little perplexity has been occasioned by the

supposed necessity of a kind of proof that the particular case did not admit of.

Again : an unbeliever will sometimes raise a discussion on one point, when, in fact, with him there is a previous question to be settled. Thus, a man will have much to say against miracles, and to everything you can urge he has a rejoinder, while all the time he has no belief in God either. It is utter waste of breath, then, to argue any matter of detail with him. The Christian's idea of God is one which makes miracles, on sufficient occasions, believable enough ; but to the atheist no amount of historic evidence, or of individual testimony, and no kind or degree of justifying results, would have a feather's weight. Not believing in God at all, or in such a God as Christ reveals, he cannot believe in any miracle, and it is simply absurd to argue the question of miracle with him.

And one thing more. There is no argument that I know of, for anything, which may not be met by counter-argument. You see this illustrated in our law-courts. There is a case for trial ; if in the Criminal Court, the accused is either innocent or guilty ; but whichever may be the unanimous verdict of the jury, with the strongly-expressed concurrence of the judge, and the entire assent of the whole audience, how much has been ingeniously argued on the other side by the able counsel employed. And it is so with all things. Therefore it may prove a word in season to some of the perplexed to suggest that they are hardly to expect to see any religious truth whatever *so* established as that nothing can be urged against it. What they believe, *on sufficient grounds*, they will do well to abide by, without being unduly affected by the fact that clever

disputants have a good deal to say against it. For a truth is not itself touched by any objection whatever, any more than the moon is touched by the baying of a hound. Truth is truth, and is not brought into suspicion with men who know by the mere circumstance that it can be argued against. Early in the present century Dr. Whately published "Historic Doubts Relative to the Emperor Napoleon." He showed very cleverly what room for doubt there was, how suspicious were the alleged evidences, and argued the great probability of the whole history being purely mythical. The sapient public thought it a covert attack on the Evidences of Christianity! Whereas, he meant to expose the hollowness of the objections thereto made by the sceptic, by showing how precisely the same sort of objections could be plausibly made and sustained against the whole world's belief in the career of Napoleon, then only recently dead. He wanted to show without saying so in so many words, that certain arguments against Christianity proved too much, and were therefore null and void.

As the points I have been trying to put plainly before my reader are really of fundamental significance and importance, I shall allow myself to fortify them by a quotation.

On the trial of Müller for the murder of Mr. Briggs, the Lord Chief Baron Pollock, in his charge to the jury (as reported in the *Times* of October 31, 1864), said:—"I have heard the late Lord Tentenden frequently lay down a rule, which I will pronounce to you in his own language. 'It is not necessary that you should have *a certainty which does not belong to any human transaction whatever*. It is only necessary that you should have

that certainty with which you would transact your own most important concerns in life.' No doubt, the question before you to-day, involving as it does the life of the prisoner at the bar, must be deemed to be of the highest importance ; but you are only required to have that degree of certainty with which you decide upon and conclude your own most important transactions in life. Gentlemen, to require more would be really to prevent the repression of crime, which it is the object of criminal courts to effect."

I want my reader to ponder this judicial deliverance. In a case involving the taking away of life even, great judges rule that less than absolute certainty—what might be stigmatised, if it were a *religious* question, as "*only probability*"—is to decide. And I am persuaded that many persons who have been perplexed about the truths of Christianity would soon find their minds at comparative ease by a judicious recognition and use of the hints contained in this letter. In an article on Müller's execution, the *Times* (Nov. 15, 1864) says :—"However crushing the evidence of a murderer's guilt, however flimsy the defence set up on his behalf, the horrible and irrevocable nature of his punishment *paralyses in some minds the power of appreciating moral certainty*, and induces a craving for some higher kind of proof." And so some persons are unhappily affected by the fact that a good deal of religious truth can only be established on grounds which still leave possible a morbid craving for a kind of proof that the case does not admit of. But if we have evidence that would justify a jury in bringing in a verdict—no matter what was cleverly urged on the other side—we have as much as, in many cases, we ought to require. To require

more would be to take leave of common-sense. In the nature of things there is a great deal that is true that cannot be "proved" to be true. A friend may be charged with an act which I am sure it is not possible he can have committed, and which, in fact, he has not committed; yet all the circumstances may be against him. I have nothing to put against all the suspicious appearances but my long and intimate knowledge of the man, and I am morally certain of his innocence, but I cannot prove it. Shall I refuse to believe in his innocence, therefore? Not I. Neither would you. And so we all of us, in life, necessarily believe many things we cannot "prove." This does not detract from the necessity of proof in cases in which it may fairly be demanded; but it will make us keep some of our common-sense when we deal with the all-important questions of religion. Some have surrendered the citadel of their faith, because the summons was made with a great flourish of trumpets, when the citadel was safe enough. And I believe that, if we will only take good heed as to what we include within our Zion, we may very well borrow the words of the Psalmist, "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following: For this God is our God for ever and for ever."

## NO. V.

### *A WORD ABOUT VERIFYING.*

I REGRET that what I wish to say on this subject could not have been added to the previous Letter, but that was already too long; the reader, however, will kindly look over that again, and let this follow as a continuation.

Of late we have heard a good deal about this "verifying;" and the simple demand that this or that alleged truth should, first of all, verify itself before receiving any decent treatment, has been held to bar the way to all other suggestions: No, sir, you must, first of all, verify it.

Now, I submit that our friends who so peremptorily insist on everything being verified, on penalty of being cold-shouldered out of all good (intellectual) society, are by no means so original in their idea as may seem. They have been forestalled by a few thousand years. In that very book which is now eyed askance with so much suspicion, which is out among us now as if on a sort of ticket-of-leave, I rather think we may find it abundantly recognised. So far back as the time of Moses, we have him—who professed to speak what, in some way, God gave him to speak to Israel—making the people the most ample promises of all sorts

of individual and national prosperity, if only they would obey the voice of their King and God. They had the means of verification in their own hands, and were urged to put the spoken word to a plain and practical test. Whether or not God did really speak to Moses the things he said God spoke, they could verify, and they were besought to do so.

But what was the test proposed? Simply that of experience. See; if they were good and obedient, doing the thing it was represented to them that God wished them to do, they should have and enjoy such and such blessings; blessings very tangible, too, and such as would gladden the hearts of any nation. That was plain enough. The stupidest half-breed among them could understand that. You may read all about it in Deuteronomy. It was laid down as a fundamental principle of their "glorious constitution," and the whole of their subsequent history turned on this hinge: Obey the Lord your God in such and such a way, and you shall have peace and plenty, not even a cow shall drop her calf, and not a hostile foot shall cross your borders. And from that day, for centuries on centuries, all their patriots and prophets harped on this string, and over and over again psalmists and other spokesmen for God represented God himself as bewailing the self-willed stupidity which would not obey and be blessed. "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me," &c. (Ps. lxxxi. 8—16). Just read the entire paragraph. So, Is. xlviii. 18, "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." I appeal to everybody who can read English, whether that is not the key-note in which

the Jewish Scriptures are pitched. You see, then, God himself, of his own accord, wanting the people to verify the truth, that he did really speak by his servants. And, as in Deuteronomy, and all through, so the very last Book in the Old Testament contains a renewal of the offer (Mal. iii. 10), "And prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open to you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Mark, however, the people were not encouraged to *invent tests for themselves*, according to their own arbitrariness or capriciousness. It would be most unbecoming, most irreverent, a thorough reversal of the relation subsisting between God and the creature, a complete turning of things upside down, for them to think they might hit upon whatever test they chose. The one offered was simplicity itself, admirably practical, too, and within their easy power.

And I observe, further, that, later on, Christ adopted the same tone with the people of his day, not only to his already disciples, but to those who were hovering on the outskirts of the circle. Men's minds were greatly exercised about him. Some said he was a good man, a prophet, that not even Messiah, when he came, could possibly do greater things; others said he was a deceiver, a man of questionable character and morals, nay, possessed by a devil, a blasphemer even, and worthy of death. There are no such differences of opinion about him now as there were then. And what did he do? He said, If any man will care supremely to do my Father's will, that man shall come to know, to his own fullest satisfaction, of my teaching, and whether or not I am come from God. Many did set themselves

honestly to know and do the will of the All-holy and the Fountain of all goodness and charity, and it is a fact that they did attain to something more, if possible, than perfect satisfaction ; and I say that the same test still stands, and is no more obsolete than it was the day it fell fresh from the Master's lips, like rain upon the mown grass. And [though this anticipates] I believe that if a man will earnestly set himself to do what (for the moment, even only supposing God is, and recognising what, if he is, he must be, and must, therefore, will) he may, by virtue of this mental attitude, see to be the Divine will, from one hour to another, such a man will, in due time, come to be sure of God, and sure of Christ. This, I fear, may be a hard saying to a non-Christian, who does not see that there is a logic deeper far than the logic of the schools, but all conscious disciples of the Lord Christ will back the assertion.

The Master said another thing that I may refer to. It was spoken to men already his disciples, but with an immense deal yet to learn. He engaged that if any man, learning what his commandments were, and especially entering into the fact that they summed themselves up in love, would keep his words, he (Christ) would—*i.e.*, after his disappearance from this gross world of the senses—come to that man, and abide with him (John xiv. 18—23). At the moment, it sorely perplexed those honest, loving, but as yet somewhat puzzle-pated, men, not long from their fishing-boats and nets. They could not by any means comprehend how in the world he could manifest himself to them, and not, at the same time, to the world ! Why, if Philip showed himself to Thomas, anybody else standing by would

see him as well as Thomas would. Certainly. How, then, would their Master, wonderful though they knew him to be, make his presence unmistakably perceived by them, without being seen by others? Let us say it was a riddle they were not likely to guess. How would he do it? I do not suppose they had ever seen a copy of the *Æneid*, and therefore would not be likely to ask whether he would enwrap himself in an invisible cloud, as *Æneas* and his friends were involved by his goddess-mother, and so manifest himself to them without his presence being suspected by others. They cast about in their own minds how it could be, and at last, not able even to guess, asked him point-blank, How? He knew, however, that they could not then, at all events, be made to comprehend the *modus*, so, without vainly attempting to explain what, at their then point of view, was not explainable, he simply repeated the promise. And, by-and-by, they happily came to be sure that he had promised no more than he could perform. He had told them how to verify the truth of the promise for themselves, and verify it they did. The days soon came when that word was their confidence, their joy, their strength, their life. And they found, as a fact of blessed experience, that wherever they happened to be, when they needed him he was with them. And they soon got into the habit, after his "Ascension," of speaking to him just as if they saw him; and all the enlightenment they needed at the moment, and all the fortifying help, somehow, he gave them. And this was the secret of their calm confidence before the Sanhedrim, and other judges and rulers, when threatened, when beaten, when scourged, when imprisoned, when slain. Paul may represent

them all: "At my first answer [before Nero] no man stood with me, but all men forsook me; notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me," &c. (2 Tim. iv. 16—18).

Take another of his words: "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke on you and learn of me, and you shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. xi. 28). Plain enough this. Here, in this weary world of ours, stands One who declares that he is possessed of the Divine secret of peace, and that he can guarantee deep and permanent peace to every one that will properly observe his method. And I say that the lives of his disciples showed the complete efficiency of his mode, and that through sixty generations, men and women, youths and maidens, have been verifying its truth; and, further, that so may anybody at this day who will only be thorough in his adhesion to the speaker and his directions.

May I quote yet again? Well, then, he said on another occasion, "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John viii. 12). And multitudes, through all these eighteen centuries, and at this very day in this England of ours, will bear witness that the Master's words are true, for that they have verified them. It is just the simple fact that Christ's *bonâ fide* disciples are *not* left to walk through life in darkness. Others, who have not tried the blessed experiment of trusting Christ as the Master of the great secret of true life, may, unhappily, not know whither they are going; not know whether they have a Father or not; whether they shall or shall not live on after what is commonly called death. But the Christian knows; and knows not

"merely by faith," as some would suggest, but because he already has eternal life in himself.

Now I call all this by our fashionable word just now, and say that here are most glorious promises, made without respect of persons—"If any man;" and his disciples were shown how to *verify* them, and one and all of them did verify them every day of their lives, and in the hour of their death, which for them had no sting, for the Conqueror of death was with them. "Verification?" Ay, to be sure! Why not? They verified all the truth they preached, and showed us how to verify it too. But if any man says, "I want to verify it, not in Christ's way, but in a way of my own," what can I say? I might as well go to a clever lecturer on Sound, with Mill's "Logic" under my arm, and say, "Please, sir, I want you to verify it all for me by Mill's book." Can you guess how *such* a demand for "verification" would be met?

May I hope that my reader sees that the demand for religious truth to be verified—which is a very proper one—is necessarily met by the query, By whom? And what is the particular method of verification that alone is applicable here?

If I say I have been to the old residence of Mendelssohn, and have discovered a sonata of his, or a symphony never before known, and that it is at least equal to the very best of all his known music, to whom must it be submitted for verification? Shall I expect the first dozen men I can lay hold of in Fleet Street to be able to decide? Why, no; there must be a pretty high degree of musical culture and taste to be able to do what is asked, the musical world will tell me, and I guess I shall have to submit. I think I also know a painter or two who do

not care the snap of a finger for the judgment on their productions of any of the loungers who go to Burlington House only to be amused. That theirs is true art, only those who have loved and studied and steeped their souls in art can adequately see, and it is the judgment of the few that alone they really care for. If I say that "Paradise Lost" is a noble poem, shall I put it into the hands of a clown, and expect him to verify its quality? And it is so throughout. Scientific assertions can be verified only by scientific men; historical problems handled properly only by students of history; philological, ethnological, æsthetic, &c., only by men who are conversant with the same. Why, if a child has never yet tasted honey, and has it shown to him for the first time, he perhaps will not believe your word that it is sweet. Well, what will you do? You will somehow manage to put a little of it to his lips; he tastes it, and forthwith wants more. He has verified your assertion by the sense of taste. And those singularly original writers, whose collected works we call the Old Testament, invariably take for granted that the real man—the man within, who simply has and uses his body of flesh and blood—has what for want of a better word we must call senses, too, spiritual senses, if I may say so; and they say, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good." And the teaching of St. Paul is, that spiritual things appeal to the spiritual in man; not to any of that in him which, in our translation, is called the natural man (1 Cor. ii. 13—15).

The accomplished gentleman who has chiefly set a-going this demand for the verification of whatever assumes to be religious truth, and who has invented that extraordinary periphrastic substitute for the old

name of God—"a stream of tendency, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness"—is good enough to tell us that this "one thing"—viz., that there is such "a stream of tendency"—*can* be verified ; so that here is solid rock. And I say that there is a good deal more in that old Book which is just as verifiable, and verifiable in just the same way, too, that this "stream of tendency which makes for righteousness" is verifiable—viz., by trying it, by acting upon it.

Try it, friends. And—a word in your ear—march up to Truth frankly and nobly, with a clear brow and open hand. Don't eye it askance. Don't fancy that you are called on to play the part of a detective who has been warned to look out for a rogue, and that here you shall probably find the culprit. Or, instead of vaguely saying Truth, let me say—Christ. Once, indeed, they did come out against him with lanterns and torches, and a body of police armed with swords and staves, to haul him away to an unjust judge ; but you, O my friends ! will not treat him so. Go, gaze on that wondrous face, and, remembering how many of earth's noblest have seen, they say, "the glory of God in the face of Christ," gaze at least with some reverence, some readiness to see what of truth and goodness and holiness and God there is there. Listen to him in a docile spirit. Suppose him to be, after all, the very Christ of God, who can reveal the Father to you ! what a fearful loss you incur by looking at him as Caiaphas looked, and Annas, and numbers of the Sadducees and Pharisees of his own day ! About his character, at least, no one need be in any perplexity at all ; and character is the portico to so much beside. If you have never yet tried what thorough discipleship will do to banish perplexity, try it ; only let it be out-and-out discipleship.

NO. VI.

*ABOUT VERIFYING PRAYER.*

THE subject of prayer has often been the battle-field chosen by the sceptic, as giving him, he thinks, the vantage ground against the believer. There, he thinks, he has the sun and wind in his favour, and that the stars in their courses fight upon his side; in other words, that the very "laws of nature" uphold him in his determined assault on the Christian's position. I say "the Christian's," but it ought to be very distinctly recognised that prayer constitutes an important part in *all* religions—Pagan, Mahometan, &c.—and that, in fact, it is an essential feature of what is commonly called Natural Religion. Our best Theists are found speaking about prayer in language which the Christian can very thankfully adopt. Indeed, such writers as Francis Newman (in his book on "The Soul") and Miss Frances Power Cobbe (in her book on "Religious Duty") say almost all we could wish to have said.

I have used the familiar phrase, "laws of nature." Science lays bare to us "forces," and is busy now in resolving "forces" into "Force." There Science stops; but where Science stops, Philosophy steps to the front, resolving Force into Mind. Then the Christian, who

has been listening docilely and thankfully, when the philosopher has said, Mind ! and ceased, stands up and says, GOD ! And, though we use the popular phrase, we, strictly speaking, know no laws of *nature*, but only laws of GOD. And by the laws of God in nature we understand the method that the Force, which is Mind, which again is God, is pleased to observe ; but which method is never endowed with any independent rights, so as to be entitled to set up any plea of its own for observance and honour. The free agency of God is not compromised by his methods of working, whatever uniformity may characterise them, so that they may be reckoned on. Yes, God is free. And though we may not be able precisely to define the extent or limitation, man, the image of God (not once, merely, in the dead past, but now, if the Apostle Paul is any authority), is also, to some extent, free too. And in the working out of this two-fold fact we should, perhaps, find that we could pleasantly hold our own against the sceptic, whether scientist or philosopher.

Dr. James Martineau, in his review of Greg's "Creed of Christendom," has put this with his usual felicity. Suggesting ground that might be successfully taken and held, as against Mr. Greg's position, he says "that there is a philosophy from which the religious intuitions encounter no repugnance ;" and that if Mr. Greg had been familiar with it, he "would at least have noticed its offer of mediation between Faith and Reason." "With an intellect entirely overridden by the ideas of Law and Necessity, no man can escape the force of the common objections to any doctrine of prayer or of forgiveness of sin. . . . But what if some mediæval schoolman, or some impugnner of the Baco-

nian orthodoxy, were to suggest that, though Law is co-extensive with outward nature, Nature is not co-extensive with God, and that beyond the range where his agency is bound by the pledge of pre-determined rules lies an infinite margin, where his spirit is free? And what if, in aggravation of his heresy, he were to contend that man also, as counterpart of God, belongs not wholly to the realm of nature, but transcends it by a certain endowment of free power in his spirit? Having made these assumptions, on the ground that they were more agreeable to 'intuitive' feeling, and not less so to external evidence, than the one-sidedness of their opposite, might he not suggest that room is now found for a doctrine of prayer? Not that any event bespoken and planted in the sphere of nature can be turned aside by the urgency of desire and devotion; not that the slightest swerving is to be expected from the usages of creation or of the mind; wherever law is established—without us or within us—there let it be absolute as the everlasting faithfulness. But God has not spent himself wholly in the courses of custom, and mortgaged his infinite resources to nature; nor has He closed up with rules every avenue through which his fresh energy might find entrance into life, but has left in the human soul a theatre whose scenery is not all pre-arranged, and whose drama is ever open to new developments. Between the free centre of the soul in man, and the free margin of the activity of God, what hinders the existence of a real and living communion, the interchange of look and answer, of thought and counter-thought? If, in response to human aspiration, a higher mood is infused into the mind; if, in consolation of penitence or sorrow, a gleam of gentle hope

steals in ; and if these should be themselves the vivifying touch of Divine sympathy and pity—what law is prejudiced ? What faith is broken ? What province of nature has any title to complain ? ”

The Christian thesis is—that, by prayer, he obtains blessings he would not, or even could not, otherwise get. The opponent of Christianity, or even of Theism, denies this point-blank. His thesis is—that prayer is utter waste of time and breath ; that it is a folly, an absurdity. He triumphantly demands that the belief should be verified. Very well, we say, all right ; it is verifiable enough, and because we have verified it, therefore we, with unspeakable thankfulness, stick to our belief.

For my own part, I shall ask my unbelieving friend to broaden his thesis considerably. It is not large enough to please me. I want him to say that *all prayer*, not to God only, but to man even, is useless and absurd. For if man can hear and answer prayer—which is beyond dispute—I fancy any God worthy of the name will be able to do what his creature can, especially the God we believe in, who is our Father. At all events, who would envy the God who *could not* answer his children’s cry ?

Of course the subject has its difficulties. What subject that we can take up, when we have left the nursery, has not ? The Christian does not say that, when he thinks away from the encouragement he has to pray, he discerns no metaphysical and other difficulties. We are not so simple as to hold that we can fully explain the *how* of the matter. It was recognised in Letter IV. that against many a most sure and certain truth unanswerable objections might be brought ; but that if

anything is sufficiently established, all the arguments against it must go for nothing. There are a good many people who cannot for the life of them understand how it is, if this world is indeed round, that the inhabitants don't drop off from it; nor how it is that the New Zealanders are called our antipodes because they and we stand feet to feet! If that on which we stand, say they, turns upside down, surely we should every mother's son of us fall off into space! When I was seven years old and getting my first lessons in geography, I and my companions agreed (how well I see the playground now, and the group of little urchins who were so unanimous!) that what our teachers taught us was all bosh! But was it because philosophers in jackets could not make it out? To this very day, unless I err egregiously, no man of science can really tell me *how* it is that, contrary to the law of gravitation, as appears, an iron bar will hang without falling if presented to the ends of a horse-shoe magnet suspended against a wall, or hung from a ceiling. Words we get, of course, in answer to the question; but analyse them, and you will find merely an identical proposition. To say it is by the "law of magnetism," is saying nothing; for the man of science will say pshaw! if we, on our part, profess to explain the *how* of successful prayer, which he so peremptorily demands, by "the law of prayer,"—a phrase, however, just as good. And, for my part, I am cheerfully postponing my logical satisfaction as to the *how* of a good many of my beliefs, until my scientific friends can, on their part, explain to me the *how* of a good many phenomena that come before us every day of our lives. Is not this fair? And is not the Christian who prays just as philosophical and just as

scientific as the men to whom we owe so much for their devotedness to science? Prayer is not a bit more of a mystery to me than magnetism, &c., and, as a believer, I am not going to hang down my head before any F.R.S. in any lecture-room in the world. I believe in magnetism, and I believe in prayer, though there is much in both that I cannot explain.

The difficulties that perplex men in relation to prayer are, some of them, metaphysical, some scientific, and others derived from certain speculations or assumptions about God. Shall I specify them? Why should I? since to do justice to them (and where is the good of setting up a mere man of straw?) would require much more than all the space at our command, and then the answers would take up still greater space. Volumes would be needful for that. I trust my readers, therefore, will agree with me that it will be better to confine myself to the positive, and leave the mere negative alone.

Two things, then, I should like to do; first, refer, though of necessity slightly, to what we have called the laws of prayer; and, secondly, see how the Christian's thesis, above stated, is established.

Many of those who have raised a cloud of dust about our subject have, first of all, presented so inaccurate a conception of prayer as that the very statement of it carried its own confutation. But who that knows what prayer is will say that everybody is encouraged to ask for whatever he chooses, and to expect that he will get it? The Book that affords us so much encouragement to yield to (shall I say?) our natural instinct to look above ourselves for help, the Bible, contains plenty of

intimation that not all that men may choose to call prayer avails. Says one Psalmist, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Again we read, "The sacrifice of fools [meaning the ungodly] is an abomination to the Lord." While in the Epistle of James we read, "Ye have not, because ye ask not; ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it [the thing wanted and idly asked for, under a vain notion of what prayer is] upon your lusts."

So, then, I am not warranted by the Bible to encourage a self-willed and irreligious man, who chooses to remain such, to go through the form of asking for something he would much like to have. Neither, if I am allowing any known evil thing in my heart or life, am I at liberty to go to the throne of the heavenly grace, as I might go if the proper filial spirit actuated me; nor, even though falling short of that extreme of allowed wickedness, if I want the particular blessing I seek for unworthy uses. I might even ask for things good in themselves, but may want them for unworthy ends—as Simon Magus wanted the Holy Spirit for selfish purposes, when even the wish for that holiest of gifts was indignantly and righteously rebuked as a devilish thing.

If a man would really find access to God in prayer, he must be at least willing to come into the Divine Order—that kingdom of heaven within which so much is found and enjoyed, which cannot be received, or even so much as perceived, while one remains without. The God to whom we pray is a holy God, and we must not merely "put off our shoes from our feet" in token of reverence, but our sins out of our hearts and lives;

which, and to make us holy as He is holy, is his chief desire for us. We must be at least willing to will his will instead of our own. In other words, if we want to realise the unspeakable blessedness of prayer, we must be willing—nay, desirous—to come into living unity with God, and be as children with a Father whom they revere, and honour, and love, and, therefore, trust and obey.

And as children they are invited to make their requests known unto him, and in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to tell him all that is in their hearts, all they need. For in his light they will see things more or less truly, and will be likely to ask for only such things as He can properly bestow. And though under the pressure of difficulties and trials and sufferings, they may long for relief, or for certain temporal good, yet, as children who are learning from their Elder Brother the true filial spirit, they will say, "Father, if it be possible—nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

And then, in something of this spirit, I know of nothing which they may not take to their Father, with simple but strong confidence that He will answer their prayer more wisely and perfectly than they can frame it. I know of no secular (commercial, professional, political) or domestic duty or difficulty upon which we may not go to him for help; nor anything too trivial even, for it is not trivial in his eyes if it really touches us. But it is his best gifts he most desires that we should covet; and his word is, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it;" "Ask, and ye shall receive;" "If ye being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father

give his Holy Spirit—or all good things—to them that ask him ?”

The man who is living in the kingdom of God, rooted and grounded in the Divine Order, feels that in this privilege of prayer, which is open and free to him, he has inexhaustible resources. He can get all he needs, be it what it may. And he wants no argument to justify to himself the true theory of prayer ; he has verified it out-and-out, over and over again. It is not with him a question for discussion, with its *pros* and *cons*, but a closed question. The ayes have it, and it is settled.

You see, friends, it is a question of fact, and the Christian man affirms that it is with him a most sure and certain fact of experience, of consciousness. Ah ! if I could bare to you the secret life history of only one such as I am thinking of ! If I dared only to admit you into the inner chambers of the soul of even so poor and unworthy a representative of the class as he who addresses you ! And yet, if I could but strengthen the faith of some who perhaps doubt, or win into his closet one who has never tried the blessed experiment of how much prayer can obtain, I would almost consent to throw open the sacred bridal chamber of the soul. But this I say, that, during more than forty years, I have had some stress of need to pray thousands of times, and I have never found it a vain thing yet ; but from personal experience dimly understand how an apostle could say, I can do all things through him that strengtheneth me. And many far better Christians than I am will say, on reading this last sentence, Is that all ? We could say greatly more than that, if we could bring ourselves to speak of the secret things between

God and the soul. Even so, O friends. And we have the witness of our spirits that all the testimony borne in the Bible to the blessedness of prayer is true ; and no metaphysical or other difficulties can put us out of conceit with the unquestionable facts of the case. We stand on the solid rock of Fact, and the objections that are urged are no more than the surf which, with whatever noise and force, beats against the granite cliff.

Yes, truly, if the men and women who have this golden key to the treasure-house of the unsearchable riches could speak out the deepest and blessedest facts of their own spiritual consciousness, so marvellous is the testimony they would bear that they would be encountered much as the apostles were on the Day of Pentecost, by the mockers who thought them 'under the influence of a pernicious excitement. Well, we will confess it ; to the world we are "fools." But we have found that what the world calls folly is the very way to the wisdom of God, and that the apostle had Divinest reason when he said, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise." It was his stronger way of putting what the Master had said before, "Except ye receive the kingdom of heaven as little children, ye cannot enter therein ;" for it is only unto such that he can say, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom."

I wish I had space to try to open to you the fulness of meaning there is in that other word of his, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you ;" where a complete *carte blanche*, you see, is given to a class. But that word "*in my name*" is

a very profound one, which, if we understand, we shall also understand how safely so large a promise may be so absolutely made. For in the degree in which Christ's "name" is really in us, shall we think and desire and pray as Christ himself would were he in our place. Prayer answered by God! To be sure; why not? For what if the deepest, truest, intensest prayer be the effect on us—or, rather, in us—of the Divine Spirit in warm and loving contact with our spirit, breathing into us, if I may say so, his own longings for us, so that his longing seems to be, and is, indeed, our own, though thus, unconsciously to us, inspired? Then, would not such prayer secure its own fulfilment? Would not this be the fervent inwrought prayer of the righteous man, which, James says, availeth much? Would it not be the very Spirit of God helping our infirmities, that Paul spake of? When we are strongly moved to long for the highest, which God first of all longs we should attain to, is not here a large region in which prayer is legitimate, and must be successful?

I have said it all resolves itself into a question of fact. And on this we want testimony rather than argument. The difficulties, if there are any, are for God to solve, not for us. If the blessed privilege is conferred on us as children of God, we have only to avail ourselves of it. Is it, then, the fact that God hears and answers prayer? At the question, what hosts appear! ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, whom God himself summons, saying, Ye are my witnesses. And what I say to you, my friends, is, Let their testimony through all the ages (and never clearer than it is to-day), added to your own

deep sense of need, and all that God and his Christ have done to draw you into the closet where your heavenly Father is waiting to be gracious, scatter the difficulties that have hitherto been too much allowed to perplex you.

NO. VII.

*SUPPLEMENTARY TO THE ONE ON  
PRAYER.*

LET me somewhat interrupt the course I had marked out for myself in these Letters, in order to reply to a communication from one of the class to whom they are addressed. Having received the following letter, it seems to me that both it and my reply may, without impropriety, find a place here :—

*“ Liverpool, Feb. 26, 1877.*

“ Sir,—I have read your letter on Prayer in the *Christian World*, and would ask you if it is a Christian duty to visit those who are suffering from infectious diseases—say, typhus fever or small-pox—for the purpose of imparting religious consolation or instruction? I know eminent ministers of the Gospel who will not attend such cases. Now, can it be that those who preach so eloquently about prayer, and recommend its trial to others, can really believe in its efficacy themselves? I knew a town missionary, I believe a very good man, who took the fever from one to whom he had been on an errand of mercy, and died. Our Saviour says, ‘ Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you ; ’ and surely it must

be right to ask for protection in visitations of the sick such as I have pointed out. But if ministers do not believe this, what am I to think? I feel perplexed, and my prayers are oftentimes very feeble, I am afraid, in consequence. Can the 91st Psalm be 'verified'? Is it so with the righteous? Perhaps only so far as they conform to the laws of nature. Then if afflictions are sent by God, ought not his people to wait patiently till he removes them, and not send for the doctor? You will see from the above the drift of my ideas, and I think I need not say more; but I should be very thankful if you could make some remarks that would remove these, to me, perplexities.—Yours respectfully,

"PERPLEXED."

It will be seen that there are four or five points in this letter which require to be touched upon.

1. In the first place, I am asked, If it is a Christian duty to visit those suffering from infectious diseases, as small-pox or typhus fever, with a view to present religious truth to them? On this point I have no difficulty. I cannot prescribe to any other man the precise way in which he shall fulfil his duty. I know the *principles* which must govern a Christian man, but in the acting on them he must, so far as others are concerned, be left to his own personal judgment and individual convictions. Seldom can any one of us rightly say to a brother, "This is the way, walk ye in it." It is our—duty, shall I say, or privilege?—to do all the good we can; but whether in this way or in that way I shall do the most good, who can decide? God only knows, and the child-servant of God will seek and obtain from him the guidance he needs. I am accustomed, when

consulted in cases that appear difficult to the inquirer, to put principles before him as plainly as I can, and leave the responsibility of action where it must ever lie—with the individual himself. I do not think Wisdom's self would give a categorical reply to this question, and lay down one law for all cases. Certainly, it would not be desirable for *all* the Christians in the neighbourhood to go the sick chamber. It is not the duty of *all*; so that if it is the duty of *any*, circumstances must decide whose. And I do not very clearly see why a minister should feel it his duty merely because he is a minister. The layman has as much right as he to take the post of danger and honour. If it be desirable in any case for some Christian to visit a man dangerously ill of small-pox, it is desirable that the fittest should go. Sometimes a neighbour, especially if a friend, would in reality be fitter than the minister, who might be a comparative stranger. Possibly, in the idea that "a minister" must be sent for, there may lurk unsuspectedly some notion of the official, even of the priestly, character.

Speaking for myself alone, and not presuming to prescribe his duty to any other man, I say that, as a rule, I should not, of my own accord, uncalled-for, go to visit a person lying ill of a dangerously infectious disease. For one thing, a man in that state is seldom fit to be conversed with, and the doctor would rather he were kept quiet. But more than that, I can trust him in the hands of his Father and my Father, his God and my God, believing that He is there, and that He who has ways, unknown to me, of impressing the mind and speaking to the heart, will do the very best for his child, even though he may unhappily be ignorant and

sinful. You know I do not believe that Death slams the gates of mercy for ever against all but the "little flock" and "the chosen few." Doubtless it is incalculably better every way to have come to God by repentance and faith ere we go hence ; but for those who have unhappily departed without that knowledge of God which is life eternal, I sorrow not as those who have no hope. There is the same God behind the veil, and his name is the same—Love, Light, and Father of the spirits of all flesh. But my reason for not going to the chamber of infection, unsent for, would not be, I sincerely trust, the cowardly one of over-valuing my present life in the flesh, but simply that, though I may have a right to risk my own life, I have no right lightly to incur the risk of bringing away and spreading infection, and so risking I know not how many other lives ; to say nothing of the claims upon me of those who call me by the tenderest appellations.

But, if sent for, I should go without hesitation. The call would then come, I think, as the call of duty, which settles everything.

2. Then, as to praying that I might not take the infection ; I fancy the less I thought, or, if possible, cared even about that, the better. I am by no means sure that I should pray so ; simply because the consciousness of my own ignorance and weakness has been so inwrought into me that I am perfectly sure I do not know what would, on the whole, be for the best—best all round, and in the long run, that is. All consequences of doing right it is our privilege, our prerogative, to leave in our Father's hands. I think the Master would say, Have faith in God, and do what appears to thee thy duty. Sunday faith that is not also week-day

faith is of mighty little use, and is, quite possibly, a delusion.

3. As to "eminent ministers of the Gospel who will not attend such cases," I dare not reflect on them. Circumstances alter cases. They may be justified, or they may not. I cannot judge. To his own master each one standeth or falleth. Who am I that I should judge another man's servant? It may require more moral courage to abstain than to go. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind what is his duty at the time. And if one such, looking on the pale, anxious, pleading face of a wife, and on little ones that do not seem as if they could dispense with a father's care and love, should feel the claims of home to have precedence, let who will cast the first stone; I dare not.

4. My friend quotes the text, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you." I have said something on that in the Letter on Prayer (No. VI.). To ask in Christ's name does not mean that we just tag on the words "for Christ's sake," to whatever we have chosen to ask for. As I said, the more really Christ's name is in us, which is not very different from Christ himself in us, Christ dwelling in us, the more shall we pray as Christ would pray in the circumstances; and to such prayer as that the largest promise may well be made. He did not pray absolutely against being falsely condemned, or scourged, or crucified. What he did pray for he had. "He was heard." Heb. v. 7.

5. As to Psalm xci. I hope, by-and-by, to say something about the Scriptures, and cannot here enter prematurely on that subject. It must suffice to say that this psalm, which is anonymous, is a marvellously

beautiful outpouring of some Hebrew believer's confidence in God. The writer, says Dr. Perowne, "paints all dangers and fears vividly to the eye of his mind, in order to express the more joyfully his confidence that none of these things can move him, that over all he is more than conqueror. It is St. Paul's fervid exclamation, 'If God be for us, who can be against us?' expressed in rich and varied poetry?"

And if the reader will turn to Romans viii. 31—39 he will see that the apostle does not contemplate exemption from suffering, but triumph over it, which is quite another thing. We are most grandly saved from "the hour" we dread, not by being excused from it, but by being gloriously brought right through it. The thorn in the flesh may be left, and yet the Christian may find he is delivered from it. Is this a paradox? So the fine believer who pours out his soul in this psalm feels himself safe in the hands of God, and that neither pestilence nor anything else can hurt him. As Peter says, 1 Peter iii. 13, Who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good? and yet, in the very next sentence, supposes that they may have to "suffer for righteousness' sake;" but then he was man enough, and took for granted that they were men enough, to rejoice at suffering for Christ and his cause. So that, understood not superficially, under the undue influence of our bodily senses, but right nobly as a son of God might speak, in whom the instincts of immortality assert themselves, I should answer the question, "Can Psalm xci. be verified?" with an unhesitating Yes! That is, I hold the strongest language of faith in God to be the fittest. But I do not understand the connected sentences of this glorious

hymn, the outpouring of the devout man's heart, as so many "texts" written by dictation of God, guaranteeing exemption from disease, &c. Good men may die of "the pestilence," or be killed by "lions," or stung by "adders," without any discredit being done thereby to the gallant faith of the believer, whose faith looks not so much to the things that are seen and temporal as to things unseen and eternal.

6. If afflictions are sent by God, should we not submit to them, and abstain from the physician? This opens too large a subject to be entered on casually. I shall have something to say, by-and-by, on the existence of "evil," and must beg my correspondent to wait, contenting myself with saying here only this one word. The question takes for granted that diseases, small-pox, &c., are from God. I say that all evil—dirt, ignorance, misery, cholera, as well as sin—is hateful to God, and to be fought against with all our powers, with those very means which he has provided for our use, in labouring together with Him to sweep his world clean of them all. If God had sent disease, Christ Jesus our Lord would not have healed it. He was the Manifestor of the Father, and, in curing men and women of their diseases, was just showing the mind of the Father concerning them. That He can over-rule all things for greater good, ultimately, does not alter the fact that such things are not "his doings." The Scriptures very plainly teach, and in some of their latest pages, too, that some things here are "not of the Father."

There are matters touched on in this Letter, which I would rather not have touched even thus slightly, because of what I am contemplating in Letters farther on; but as I could not allow my correspondent to go

without any reply, I thought it might be well for my too brief answer to his questions to appear thus, since the inquiries grew out of the previous Letter on Prayer.

But I cannot bring myself to quite conclude this Letter on Prayer without one word on another aspect of the subject.

Beyond all question, it is of unspeakable preciousness to the anxious and distressed soul to be encouraged to pour forth all its desires into our Heavenly Father's ear,—as the apostle says, to “make known all our requests unto God.” But I doubt not that many a devout soul comes in time—when alone with God—to find itself less engaged in mere direct petitioning than in some other exercises. When the Psalmist says, Ye people pour out your heart unto Him, he was assuredly not thinking merely of their asking God for what they needed. The good men whose story is briefly given in the Scriptures told God of their distresses, their perplexities, their bewilderments. They told Him what in his government of the world, or in his providence towards themselves, appeared hard and out of harmony with their every-day conceptions of righteousness and goodness. Thus Abraham ventured on reverent remonstrance even, and was allowed. Job plainly uttered his profound sense of the unintelligibleness, on any principles known to him, of the divine proceedings towards himself—and God tenderly suffered his afflicted servant thus to relieve the over-fraught heart. So with Jeremiah, who was even allowed to carry loyal boldness to the extreme of pleading, as in chap. xiv. 21, Disgrace not the throne of thy glory!

Often, we *must speak* what, if pent up, will all but kill the heart, or, falling short of this, cannot but still prove

most corrosive. Now prayer, as scripturally conceived of, includes this filial privilege of frank address and appeal; and you may be sure, my friends, that it is immeasurably better to tell God himself all the difficulties and perplexities which distress and weaken us, and tend ultimately, if not wisely medicined, to utter scepticism. It would not surprise me to learn that some devout souls often find themselves far more engaged in speaking to God, in talking to Him—may I say?—than in merely just asking Him for what they want. Quite possibly some of us—fully entering into our Lord's word about our Heavenly Father's knowing what things we have need of before we ask Him—do for the most part very much leave things in his hands, availing ourselves of the hour of prayer for even deeper exercises than the presentation of our personal needs, though, of course, without forgetting these. There is such a thing as *communion* with God, *fellowship* with the Father and the Son; and this is what the apostle longed to bring his brother disciples to, who assuredly knew already the blessedness of what is ordinarily meant by prayer. And this is that further *closet within the closet*, where the jarring voices of the disputant and the sceptical objector cannot enter. Then God himself hides us in his pavilion, and the soul begins to open to the great peace it so (sometimes it seems almost hopelessly) longs for, "the peace of God which passeth understanding."

NO. VIII.

*ABOUT BELIEVING IN GOD.*

WE recognised in the first Letter the far-reaching character of the scepticism of the present day touching God ; and, before proceeding further, I wish to say a word to those who are painfully affected, perplexed perhaps, by the tone of some of our literary men, and especially of such as deem themselves "advanced thinkers." Now, when we hear of advance, we naturally inquire—in what direction ? In the old soldier days when the pike was still in vogue, a captain once gave the command, "Elevate your pikes lower, and advance one step backwards !" If our advanced thinkers are getting nearer the blessed light and the eternal day ; if they are making life fuller, more hopeful than ever, and more glorious—then we too shall be glad to follow such happy leading. But if they are "advancing backwards ;" if under their lead our light grows dimmer, and our faces are set towards darkness and black night ; if, instead of giving us knowledge, they take old Montaigne's motto for their own, *Que sais-je ?* why—then, we must, with all friendliness to them, part company.

And what I wish to do before entering on the proper subject of this Letter is to warn those for whom I write

that it is possible to lay far too much stress on the fact that some clever and accomplished men profess themselves unable to find any trace of God, either in nature or in the history of the human race ; possible to be very unduly influenced by our knowledge of this circumstance. Yet our young men, and others, may sometimes think that a staggering blow has been struck on the very face and heart of Faith by the bold avowals of unbelief. Let them be calm ; for our faith has not been touched. If a man says, "I cannot find—I see nothing,"—well, he just affirms his own inability or failure ; that is all ; and he is not entitled to make his ignorance the rule for all the world. His non-success is just his own experience, thus far, and no more. He may yet attain ; who knows ? To lay down that no other can possibly find what *he* has hitherto failed to find, would be a very unscientific, unphilosophic procedure. It might almost be called—the philosophic grotesque. Has he explored all worlds ? searched all space ? mastered all mind ? exhausted all humanity's power of thought ? sounded the depths of all human and other consciousness ? dived below or soared above all experience ? comprehended all the Possible ?

And so far as imposing names are concerned, nothing is easier than to balance—and with unspeakable satisfaction, too, not to say pride—our list of famous names against those arrayed on the side of denial. Are there some few men eminent in science, or philosophy, or literature, who proclaim either that there is no God, or that, if there be, it is not possible to find him—that he is, and must be, Unknown, Unknowable, and Unthinkable even ? Very well. I call to the front a multitu-

dinous host of "witnesses," many of them in all respects the equals—to say the least—of our Agnostics (their favourite appellation just now), and they declare that they have found God (or, as they would rather say, been found by him), and that they not only know much *about him* that it is life from the dead to know, but that they know HIM; that they have at times been made sublimely conscious of his Presence; that they have held unmistakable intercourse with Him; that they have asked things from Him, and over and over again had the very blessings that they sought; so that now they have a confident faith in God which nothing can affect, which is the joy and gladness of their hearts, and the light and strength of their daily lives; that what they see (the eyes of their heart having been opened, as St. Paul says) and experience of the Divine is, for certainty to themselves, far, far beyond the certainty which the senses give (about which also science has some things to urge, and philosophy others); and that for them the illimitable future is gloriously lighted up. In this unquenchable conviction, and bearing this testimony, what multitudes have lived, and how many are living now! So that we have reason on our side when we counsel our young men, and others, not to be painfully affected by any names that may be paraded in favour of unbelief; for when Dr. This, or Professor That, is quoted as if his *dictum* must carry everything before it, we have only to call to mind the long array of men famous in all departments of human life and energy, whose joy it has been to believe in God. Truly the believer is surrounded with a great cloud of witnesses, and is never likely now to be disconcerted by any names whatever that may be quoted against him.

Let it be understood, however, that I have taken this line, for a moment only, for the sake of a class, who, in their inexperience, are too apt to be unduly impressed when they are told that the very clever So-and-So, and the highly intellectual Mr. Somebody Else, not only do not believe in Christianity, or even in God, but say that those old words stand now for worn-out and obsolete ideas. Indeed ! But if all the world (which a certain writer once said was lying in darkness) disbelieved, that would not touch the fact that GOD IS. Only, so much the worse for the world !

"Well, then," some one says, "never mind the names ; we see that it is not, cannot be, a question of authority, but of argument. Can you answer their arguments ? Can you, on your part, prove the Being of God ?"

I reply, in the first place, that I am not quite so sure that it is, primarily, a matter of argument ; and, secondly, that the atheistic arguments have been fairly met and answered, I think most triumphantly, over and over again, hundreds of times. Christianity, which, of course, is rooted and grounded in Theism, has had its keen and zealous antagonists in all ages from the beginning ; and the old objections, which have been answered, and, I should say, confuted, times without number, are, nevertheless, being perpetually reproduced and paraded as if they were brand-new ones, till it is an utter weariness of the flesh to have to listen to them, and deal with them.

"Can I prove the Being of God ?"

Whether I can, or not, there are more men than I can easily reckon who claim to have done so, and in very many of their arguments I can detect no flaw what-

ever. Only just recently Cardinal Manning (I mention it only for what it may be worth) has asserted that the scholastic philosophy absolutely demonstrates it; and further on, in these Letters, I hope to point out methods of intellectual satisfaction on this great question. But I am not going to inflict metaphysical subtleties on the readers of this particular series of Letters, and, at present, at all events, I wish to take another line.

“Can I prove the Being of God?”

I believe that there are many, very many, different lines of thought which all conduct the not unwilling mind to the same central point of rest—GOD. I should express my own belief more accurately if I were to say—*re-conduct*. For, on the whole, I hardly think that men in general come to believe in God simply by force of logical constraint. And I want my readers to ask themselves whether, so far as their own personal experience and observation go, they find that first belief is the pure result of any argumentative process or intellectual research? I think—and I lay some stress on the fact—that for the most part men believe in God, they for a time hardly know how or why, and often their faith may go on growing and strengthening and clearing itself, without any perplexing questions arising to disturb it. We happily begin life as children, not logicians. By-and-by, if the mind be active, we begin of ourselves to want to justify to our own understandings what we have been so easily believing; or else books, society, companions, prick the easy soul into a questioning mood, and we are confronted by the demand to give a reason for our faith. Then, when so pressed, we begin to look out for arguments that we may use to justify the keep-

ing of something that we already have, but which we are perhaps summoned to surrender. I think it is thus and here, that arguments for the Being of God are sought for. Then, if intellectual satisfaction can be found, we go on believing all the more happily, and our faith stands a better chance of becoming deeper, wider, more robust, freer, nobler. If such satisfaction to the understanding of what the conscience apprehends and the heart wants is, from circumstances, perhaps, not speedily forthcoming, we are thrown into perplexity, doubt, and our ship of life, unanchored, rudderless, and drifting out with the receding tide, is borne out of sight of land, and tossed about, in the darkness of night, on the heaving billows of a seemingly shoreless ocean, in which it seems as if we should ultimately and finally be engulfed.

In this condition different men act differently. Some will too easily accept the Everlasting No, and the melancholy notion that they are orphans in a poor fatherless world ; but in pity to others (God bless them !) will keep their doubts to themselves, and rather let the wolf eat out their own hearts than propagate their dreary unbelief. Others, though sad, will nevertheless press on, try one method after another, and, knowing something of what—if there be a God—He must be and will, set their faces steadily towards all righteousness and goodness, and continue to seek after God if haply they may find Him. And, sooner or later, I believe the quest of such is crowned with noble and joyous success, for their seeking after God is, I take it, God seeking after them ; his longing translating itself in their consciousness. Others, again, will unhappily accept their present failure to find satisfactory arguments as a final thing, and with, strange to say, no sadness

and no hesitancy, will publish their failure, and become for a time, prophets of denial and unbelief. My own comfort concerning them, too, is that God does not abandon those who, from whatever cause, are ignorant of Him. And I believe that the idea of God never does really die wholly out in human hearts. But this will lead me too far from my present point, if I do not check the thoughts which strive to get expressed.

I said that generally we do not get our faith—I had almost written get our God—as the result of any process which is crowned with the letters Q. E. D. God is not the last word of a demonstration. In other words, God is not a corollary. There is neither major nor minor before him. *We begin with God, and only afterwards want to justify our belief.* I should say that, in the kind Providence of our Father who is in heaven, we are born into the world with a precious inheritance that we have not toiled for, and unconsciously learn to take for granted that there is a Power above and over us whom—with vague and varying, and, if we be wise and obedient, ever-enlarging, conceptions—we call God. Of course, if I had to widen my present outlook, so as to take in all the world, I must limit myself to saying that it is only a generic idea of God that is thus slowly born within us from an unknown point in our mental development. But I confine myself to a land like our own and the present age, and then I say that some idea (more or less happy, or more or less unhappy, as the case may be) of One whom Christians call God, comes to us insensibly, we know not how, from our very childhood, almost as if it were in the air we breathe. Nor can we in after-life get rid of it. Even the atheist has the idea of God in his mind; ay, and cannot divest himself of it, do

what he will. It is there. It haunts him, wherever he is. And no clever books can fully avail to disenchant him. No boldest denier among his associates can exorcise it, and in no atheistic club can he really get away from it. Is it a NOTHING that he spends his time and breath in trying to disprove? And do our unbelieving men of science really devote their laborious days and nights and their admirable powers to the investigation of an absolutely soul-less, mind-less Somewhat? *i.e.*, bring *their* vigorous *minds* to bear on that (Nature) where no MIND is!

But I am to suppose that some of those for whom I write have come to be perplexed by the scepticism of the present day (of which, perhaps, too much is made) and that they would gladly hail a helpful word, if such can be spoken. They will permit me to commend to them the above remarks as neither wholly irrelevant, perhaps, nor without their bearing on the subject.

They have been taken aback, it may be, by somebody's triumphant demand that they should "prove," "demonstrate," that God is, and they have painfully felt their incompetence to do so. Let them take heart. It is an absurd thing to demand the same kind of proof for all the different things that we believe, as we saw in the Letter on "Certainty." In logic, the two premises of the syllogism have to be given. They are simply unproved affirmations, from which the corollary comes out as a matter of course. Some things are too true to be proved. If I do not *begin* by proving that God is—for the idea of Him must be prior to all attempt at proof or disproof, so that He already exists in my mind as an idea, at all events)—yet, when I already have my God, I can justify my belief to myself. And if I can justify

*to myself* my belief in God, I am content, I am at peace. Is not that enough, if I can do no more? Perhaps, the man who finds fault with all my arguments has, as yet, no wish to believe. Perhaps he would rather not believe. In which case, no argument whatever would convince him, or stop the quibbling which he thinks it so clever to indulge in. If he is in earnest and honest, he will gladly weigh what the believer adduces, and not be eagerly bent on finding it all naught. Mark well this sign.

Yes, I think I cannot too strongly urge on those who are disconcerted, perhaps nonplused, by the demand to "prove," to "demonstrate," that God is, that, instead of yielding to the feeling of distress at their argumentative incompetence, they fall back with contentment on what satisfies themselves. If they *know* that their faith has a sufficient basis, though the logical faculty in them may never have been educated, let them remember that they are not called on to satisfy everybody that may choose to idle away his time in trying to unsettle the belief of the young and inexperienced, but to get and keep that which shall satisfy their own understandings, purify and strengthen their own consciences, and fill their own hearts with keener, truer, nobler life. Why, if I could not as yet attain to anything beyond, I almost think I could, for a time, be content with even such a knowledge of God and loyalty to Him as a dog has of and for his master! Look! The dog, in some sense, and quite sufficient for him, knows his master; knows him from all other men. If he cannot see him, he can, by a still finer sense than sight, trace him, and follow after him—follow for miles and miles, through fields, and woods, and crowded cities, till, after weeks of patient, per-

sistent, loving search, he is mad with joy again to behold him whom, all that long while, he had, without seeing, may I not say, believed in and loved? Now, what does the dog know of his master? Aught of his *essence*? Anything about the mode of his existence, or his origin? Is there not, for the dog, an immense amount of the unknown and unknowable in the man? And yet does not the dog truly know him, and love him, and find his portion in his master—ay, and even though the owner beat the dog, will not the animal be touchingly faithful, and grateful for a kind word? Why, he is a sort of four-footed Job, who if he could speak would say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Yes, friends, over and over again has my dog spoken to me (or God spoken to me through him) quite as really as Balaam's ass spoke to him. I remember how Job said, and perhaps meant more than we surmise, "Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee," &c. (xii. 7). If I, on my higher level, can, in this state, only know God as, on his lower level, the dog knows his master, is that nothing? Possibly, some of our naturalists would refer the dog's knowledge and attachment and *trust* to instinct. Well, I do not profess to know as much about instinct as I should like, but if the animal, by virtue of his nature, can know one of an order above him, why may not I, by virtue of my nature, know One above me? They will say the dog and the man have something in common; both have an animal nature, and the lower animal can know the higher animal. Very well, and I say that God and I have something in common. Is not mind, *e.g.*, homogeneous? and conscience, and heart, and will? Have we not heard the word that

man was made in the image of God? or, waiving that, if, for a time, as the dog to man, so man to God, I am not so very badly off.

Happily, as we believers in God say, He does not leave us to make Him or deduce Him for ourselves. We say, He is the Beginning. And when we begin with Him, we find a clear course before us. But when the mind once begins to ask, as sooner or later it must do, How do I know that God is? different persons will naturally take different courses. I remember how first I came to acknowledge that God might be, after the impressions of childhood had been apparently effaced, and, through unhappy influences, the poor youth had come to utterly disbelieve, or think he did. By what we should naturally call an accident (though now I should substitute a happier word, fetched out of a Diviner philosophy), I took up Grotius, "*De Veritate &c.*," and, listlessly turning over the pages, was arrested by a chapter with the title, "*De Deum Esse*," read it, and said (I smile as I write, but I bless his holy name), God is possible! There may be a God, after all! Forthwith, I got Paley's "Natural Theology" and "Evidences of Christianity;" and, happily for me, whether I ought (logically, I mean) to have been convinced or not, I was convinced, and said, GOD IS. Then, to believe that a God worthy of the name would, in some way, perhaps in many ways, reveal himself to men, seemed easy; and I took the Bible as a matter of course, and what it affirmed I resolved to believe, what it commanded I resolved to do. And when, after a long struggle for light—in the midst of darkness—by-and-by great peace bathed my soul, I felt I should believe in God, though the whole world denied Him.

Then all arguments against the Being of God, and all that was suggestive of doubt, was unspeakably distasteful ; and I shrank with horror from the thought of ever again being caught within the thick fold of unbelief and night. But, as the years rolled on, and gravest duties were devolved upon me, I had, if not for myself, yet, for the sake of others, to let myself know all that could be urged by antagonists against the idea of God. And, now, from the many lines of thought, which I believe may be successfully laid down to the affirmative result, I usually, for my own use, select one in particular, as, to my mind the readiest, the easiest, and happiest, and best. But here I must, unfortunately, break off. All that I have written in this Letter is but introductory, and I hope in my next to be able to indicate a few lines of thought, by which they who "have God" pleasantly justify to themselves their happy faith, and their holding fast of the eternal life which they are conscious that they have in Him.

NO. IX.

*ABOUT BELIEVING IN GOD*

(CONTINUED).

IF I am asked, or if I ask myself, Why I believe in God? or, How do I justify my belief to myself? I feel I have a good deal to say; but, looking for what lies readiest at hand, I find that that which lies on the surface lies also deepest down among the very roots of my being. Answering, then, only for myself, remember, and not presuming to say how it must be, or is, or should be, with others, my first answer to the question is, I believe in God because, happily, I CANNOT HELP IT. But is that philosophical? some one asks. Yes, very; I reply. And in some hands it might work itself out metaphysically, into proof of "The Necessary Existence of God." But just here I content myself with saying, that as I breathe because I must, unless I wilfully choose to die; as I hear the sounds about me because I cannot help hearing, unless I wilfully stop my ears; and as I see what is before me because I cannot help seeing, unless I choose not to see; so I find myself to be such, or I find that within me, underlying my mere bodily senses (and which alone seems to me my very real and true self), which thus simply and directly believes in God. And to me it is just as rational to say, I believe because

I cannot help believing, as to say, I feel when touched because I cannot help feeling. And who knows not that we love, before ever we look about for reasons to justify the affection? Why does the father love his child? I shall never grow too old to remember, too, the lover's only explanation — I loved her because I could not help loving her. True love is no folly, and has its own philosophy, which, where the love is true and noble, justifies itself. And so does faith.

I would rather not use words at all suggestive of controversy if I could help it, but I hardly know how better to express a portion of my own convictions on this subject than by saying, I cannot tear away from my mind or heart the consciousness of intuition, of direct seeing, any more than I can tear off my skin. I presume not to speak for others, but for myself, I cannot but believe in a direct beholding. Hebrew Psalmists, and a host since them, often spoke of the Face of God. They seem to me to have been led to the use of the happiest expression. And just as the child who has tasted something that it likes straightway cries out for "*More,*" so, as the result of what I have been made as conscious of as I am that light, warmth, food, knowledge, love, &c., are pleasant, does my inmost soul cry out for more, and more, and, ever, more!

Then, secondly, because such is the effect of the belief that I not only do not wish to help believing, but most intensely prize and cherish the idea of God. I find it good. But where is the logic of this? asks some one. Just where you find the logic of drinking when you are thirsty, taking the food you like best, or smelling a rose or violet because it is sweet. Where, I pray you, is the logic of love? Ah! friends, there is the logic

of the heart as well as of the schools ; and as, quite conceivably, some men's unbelief is the result of their not liking to retain God in their knowledge, so the belief in God because it is good, delightful, glorious, is at least as logical as their unbelief ; and that is why I have deliberately allowed myself to give this "secondly."

But I am satisfied to believe in God, thirdly, because I find him to be the necessary complement of my own being ; ay, and unutterably more than the complement, too. As I said, I presume not to speak for others, only for myself ; and then, I say, that I cannot even think of myself apart from God. As the eye must have light, and the lungs air, so the soul God. My heart and my flesh cry out for the Living God. I am not the half of myself without God : "the half !" I am but a fraction of myself ; nay, I am not that, I am nothing. The fountain is not more necessary to the stream than God is to me. "All my springs are in Thee."

And, fourthly, because every line of thought and every feeling that ennoble and strengthen me and help me to become a better man, with the inspiring hope of being one day a perfect man, confirm and approve my belief. It is good for me to believe in God. And nothing is good that is not true.

And, fifthly, because if I could be brought to believe that "the fool who says in his heart there is no God" is, after all, the wisest man, the sun would for me be darkened, and the stars fall from heaven ; the universe would be a poor, shrivelled, worthless thing, with the soul of beauty dead and gone for ever ; nature would be a lie, and life not worth the trouble of putting on one's clothes in the morning and taking them off again every evening. I am speaking for myself only.

Yet, again. I justify to myself my belief in God, because I see that if all men everywhere disbelieved in God, it would be perfectly hopeless, most wildly chimerical, to expect that any beautiful human order could be maintained in the world if there be no such thing as a Divine order. The natural result of all men's saying, There is no God, was fairly typified on a small though still terrible scale in the great French Revolution of the last century. Of course, some fine and choice spirits would be good and true and chaste and honourable, in spite of there being no longer any Divine obligation lying on them, and no God to smile approval. But the many would say, Let us eat, and drink, and gratify every passion we have, for to-morrow we die and are extinct; while not a few would say, Let us kill and slay whoever stands in the way of our doing whatever we like. What was said of a certain great Italian House would come to be said of many, that they never spared any man in their rage, nor any woman in their lust. Human laws have generally reposed on (at least, supposed) higher ones; but if there be no higher ones, then, in the utter absence of these—these being altogether “exploited,” as our American friends say—I cannot for the life of me see why the state of things in old Rome, before Christianity saved the world from the impending dissolution, and in Paris when the gutters ran with blood, should not be the state of things all the world over. Then, perhaps, after a terrible experience, would be heard again the strange and fantastic *dictum* of the Frenchman who said, If there be no God, it is necessary to create one! Yes, truly, God is the Grand Conservator of the family and the nation; and as I do not want society to be put back again so far as to have,

by-and-by, to make its own God, I exult to believe in the God I know, the God who IS, and is not made.

And, finally, for the present (for I am only speaking for myself, and not attempting just here to "prove" to others that God is), I believe in God because I believe in Christ. To my mind, whenever I am again thrown back on the question we are pondering, Christ is the finest, loveliest, grandest proof of the Being of God that can be. Of course, some will say, "Ah! but you have first of all to get your Christ." True, my friend; but when I have him, I have God; as the apostle says—[I say, as the apostle says, for, after all, our translators needed not to have put the latter half of 1 John ii. 23 in italics]—He that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. And I hope, by-and-by, to show how—in spite of all the clever antagonism to Christ in the present day, in spite of the modern form of the cry, Crucify him! Crucify him! (for that is what it amounts to)—a true soul may justify its faith in Christ. The many want a very short and simple method, and I believe that Christ is the shortest and directest way to God.

But I did not mean to do more, just here, than to give the merest and baldest abstract of a portion of that which satisfies me in holding fast to the idea of God, and must now proceed.

I said in my last that when a man finds himself summoned to justify to his understanding his previously unquestioned belief in God, and sets himself to the task, there are many different lines of thought that commend themselves preferentially to different minds. What, however, is rather surprising is, that men's fondness for that particular line which they themselves

prefer, not unfrequently leads them to disparage all the others. Thus those who take the high *à priori* road often begin their task by eagerly clearing out of the way the *à posteriori* method altogether! So have I known the argument from design zealously combated by earnest believers in God; while they whose minds are so constituted that this argument thoroughly satisfies them will, in their turn, flout the more formally philosophical methods. For my own part, seeing how differently constituted minds are (through the various faculties not being all awake, or not being all developed in the same proportion and degree), I rejoice that there are so many lines, and that each mind should get its own satisfaction in its own way. All roads lead to the capital.

The First Napoleon's was a short method. On the voyage to Egypt, sitting on deck, one fine night, the officers and *savans* of the expedition about him indulged themselves in a good deal of sceptical talk, and in ridiculing the idea of a God. At length, Napoleon, who had been silent, pointing up to the beautiful blue star-filled sky, said, "All very well; but, pray, gentlemen, who made all those?" Yes, we are such that, by our very constitution, we cannot but want to find out the causes of things, and soon, going back and back, we want the *causa causans*, the cause behind all causes. The child, the peasant, and the man who has happily learned that he must become a child in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven, are soon satisfied to name the cause of all things—GOD, and to find everywhere abundant revelation of Him.

Others will begin by taking the words true, right, beautiful, good. They say we cannot pronounce that

this is true, that that is beautiful, and the other right and good, without having the conception of the true in itself, the right, or the beautiful, or the good, in itself; and thus, that there is something that is true, something that is beautiful, something that is good; and thence, by careful steps, they conduct us to the Absolute Truth, Absolute Beauty, Absolute Goodness—GOD.

Others very earnestly distinguish between reason and the understanding. It has of late become the fashion to treat this distinction, as Coleridge taught it, with some superciliousness; but I venture to say that all who have once thoroughly mastered it will never let go the lesson they have learned, however their philosophical nomenclature may possibly change. They will remember how Mr. Carlyle, in those earlier days, before he began to ridicule "the om-jec-tive, and the sum-jec-tive," himself quoting approvingly from Schlegel, pronounced the establishment of this distinction to be equal in importance to the Reformation. However, be that as it may, they who have sat at the feet of "the master of all modern thought," as Dr. Arnold called him, in reason see and bow before the Infinite Reason, the Eternal Light, who shines into the human mind according to its measure of receptiveness, which will always be according to its faithfulness. They find that reason (not the power of reasoning which they lodge in the understanding) is neither mine nor yours; that it is the same in kind, though not in degree, in all; that it is a Divine ray, lighting every man that cometh into the world; and in the absolute reason they, too, find—GOD.

Yet, again, others find the intellectual satisfaction they crave in the fact of a moral sense, conscience, the

law written in the heart. So the philosopher was filled with awe as he contemplated the starry heavens and the moral law. For there is, beyond all question, "the categorical imperative ;" the Thou oughtest, and Thou oughtest not ; Thou must, and Thou must not ; Thou shalt, and Thou shalt not. And not a few, recognising the authority, the majesty, of that which thus "Thous" the inmost soul, and

"Before which our mortal nature  
Doth tremble like a guilty thing surprised,"

feel themselves in the presence and in the hands of One who has power over them, and rights as to them, and who must be even more of a Person than they are ; and thus some get God through the conscience, while it is very certain that a conscience set at naught will very soon make the individual *wish*, at least, that there were "no God" to call him to account.

Others, through the affections. They love. They find it good to love. Singing in their hearts that it is

"Better to love than be belov'd,  
Though lonely all the day,"

they find that love to them becomes a Divine thing, and evidences itself as such. And the more purely and deeply and unselfishly they love, the more they feel the reality and illimitableness of love, and that it is indeed their very life. Through it their own nature, their own being, expands, swells, and feels at home in the boundless. The affections luxuriate in the thought of never coming to an end, and are a congenial soil for the instincts of immortality to root themselves in. And then through love they believe in love ; they believe in Infinite Love ; so that love is itself an evangel, and

whispers musically of God, and the blessed truth that God is Love evidences itself, shines in its own light. Love can reveal itself to love, and only to love ; and in the degree of pure and mighty and all-conquering love in any heart is there the witness of the Spirit with their spirit that one day love shall be universally regnant and triumphant. And thus the Divine glow of love shrivels up and consumes all the wood, hay, and stubble of opposition to the idea of God. So, too, the happy cannot but believe in happiness, and finding how creation teems with joy (though not with joy alone, else, possibly, joy would not be), they must believe in a Joy-giver, and they receive with thankful ardour the apostolic word, The Gospel of the glory of the Happy God.

So the grateful want some one to whom they can offer the tribute of happy thankfulness with which their bosom swells. They want, they profoundly want, to praise, and would more distressingly miss a Divine Recipient of their grateful praises than they would a Divine Hearer and Answerer of Prayer.

You see, friends, I am not laying down lines of argument by which the unbeliever is bound to be convinced, but only intimating ways in which different persons satisfy themselves that their faith in God is justifiable. For, as I have said, we are not called on to satisfy other people. Some would not be satisfied, do what you would. Some do not want to believe. I am sure I know men of whom it is no lack of charity to say that they inwardly fight against everything that tends to make for the being of God. As there were men who hated Christ when he was on earth, so I am sure there are men who hate him now. I have personally known

such, and they have with keenest eagerness grasped at everything that could be turned against him. How could such men love the consideration by which belief in such a God as Christ came to reveal is supported?

Mind, I am not saying, I am far enough from thinking even, that all men who find it difficult to believe in God do so because they are of an evil heart. That would be a false and base thing to say. I can only too well believe that some find themselves simply overpowered by the vastness of the idea when they attempt to realise it. They cannot think the Infinite. The Absolute refuses to be comprehended. Space and time are too masterful for them; how shall they conceive of the Eternal! With all my heart I sympathise with them. I, too, know what it is to be bewildered thus. But I am content not to be able to think the Infinite, the Absolute, and all the rest of it. I know that there must be in God the unknown and the unknowable; necessarily so. But what then? *All* is not unknown and unknowable because I admit the existence of this. Have you never seen a two or three-year-old darling sitting, oh so fondly, on a father's knee? The father may be a famous soldier and statesman, or a poet of world-wide fame, or a man of science whose name will live for ever, or all these in one. There is, therefore, in the father an indefinite amount of—to the child—the unknown and unknowable. But does the child, therefore, not know its father? The minister of Henri Quatre one day found the famous warrior-king on all fours, playing with his children, who were as merry and happy as children could be. They could not have been made to guess even at what statesmanship meant, or the conduct of a campaign; but did not the little ones,

think you, know *him*? That would be a mighty poor father in whom there was nothing unknown and unknowable to the child. And that would be so poor a God as not to deserve the name of whom the whole was knowable and known! And He would be as poor a God, too, who *could not* make known anything of himself to his intelligent creatures (I should call them, with Aratus first and afterwards with Paul, "his offspring"). If He could not, something would limit Him, and how then is He infinite? In one sense no one has ever seen the ocean. What the eye can take in of it is next to nothing in comparison with what the ocean really is. Yet have we, therefore, not seen the sea? Nay, of anything ever so trivial that we say we see, how much do we see? Of a mountain, or of my study-table I see only the surface, not the thing itself; the phenomenon, not the substance.

But I had not done with the line of remark I was touching on, when I allowed myself a little deviation.

I was saying that men, being cast in a great variety of moulds, being of many different mental temperaments, seek for and find, or find without seeking, their God in different ways or by different methods. The mechanic type of mind may find (to itself) most satisfactory evidences of an Almighty Designer everywhere, and, full of the idea of cause and effect, see in every rolling star and every blade of grass, and every drop of morning dew, sufficient proof of One Great Cause at the back of all things; while he whose whole being delightedly responds to every soft whisper of beauty will exult to offer his homage to the First Fair, as he finds, "Beauty—a living Presence of the Earth."

The mathematician is not to be wondered at who,

finding that all that he and his brethren have for thousands of years been laboriously learning of the marvellous properties of lines and curves is eternally present in the universe, stands in reverence, and exclaims, The Great Geometer! While the poet will all-spontaneously burst forth into joyous exclamation or song, since to him

“ The world is full of poetry ; the air  
Is living with its spirit ; and the waves  
Dance to the music of its melodies,  
And sparkle in its brightness,” &c.

Naturally he calls Him, whom no name can express, The Poet of the Universe. So he whose happily susceptible nature is filled with a thousand varying emotions by morning and evening and night, by sunrise and sunset, by the yellow moon, and the influences of Orion and the Pleiades, by the music of the wind among the branches, and the sound of the murmuring brook, or the incoming tide of the homeless sea, will feel that he gets his happiest consciousness of God through the Soul.

But, without attempting to exhaust the differing types, we may say, in a word, that the man in whom intellect predominates will ask for one kind of proof, the moralist for another, the artist for a third, the mechanician for a fourth, while he in whom conscience is to the fore, as he also who is naturally religious (and Tertullian said, *Anima naturaliter Christiana*), will be most impressed by quite another class of “ evidences.” All are not convinced or even touched by one and the same line of thought or attempted proof. But, as we have said, there are many ways to the metropolis, and God has many ways of bringing his children to the

recognition of himself, who, when once incipiently known, begins to reveal himself as a many-sided God.

The Christian is not insensible to these various appeals to the intellect, to the conscience, to the soul, or to the heart ; but often he feels that he is not dependent on any of them. He is not touched if one and another should dispute their worth, and sniff at all so-called "proofs." The more Christian he is, the more he knows he has the witness in himself. No logic could force him to let go his hold of God. In *Christ* he finds one ever-sufficing stronghold for faith to betake herself to when ever so hard pressed ; and, possibly, I may yet dwell on this unspeakable satisfaction. But as it is more than time this Letter were brought to a close, I will just fall back on the full delight with which he who has once come to know God for himself feels that his personal assurance, the result of that conscious experience which he can never call in question, is proof against all that opposes it.

"Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest  
Cannot confound, nor doubt him, nor deny ;  
Yea, with one voice, O world ! tho' thou deniest,  
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

"Rather the earth shall doubt when her retrieving  
Pours in the rain and rushes from the sod,  
Rather than he for whom the great conceiving  
Stirs in his soul to quicken into God.

"Ay, tho' thou then shouldst strike him from his glory,  
Blind and tormented, maddened and alone,  
Even on the cross would he maintain his story,  
Yes, and in hell would whisper, I have known."

NO. X.

*ABOUT BELIEVING IN GOD*

(CONTINUED).

I FELT somewhat at a loss in deciding whereabouts, in our necessarily too brief treatment of this subject, to bring in what seemed desirable to say about God *himself*. I have spoken of *believing* in Him, ought I not to have begun by *defining* Him? laying down distinctly what I mean when I pronounce the sacred name—GOD.

Ah, friends, let us call to mind what Joubert (who has been styled the French Coleridge) said :—" May I say it? It is not hard to know God, provided one will not force one's self to define Him."

You must have often observed, often felt, how *thought* swells and fills a far vaster circle than *words* do. Certainly, I should never envy the man who has always been able in *words* to express all his thoughts and emotions, all his affections and aspirations. How constantly we say, when labouring with something that belongs to our deepest and best nature, Words are so poor! And what is *music* but a mode of expression that leaves words far behind, and opens to the kindling soul the rainbow gates of a realm where thought and feeling have disembarrassed themselves of their syllabic

fetters? Johnson's dictionary would be worse than useless *there*. Words are counters for the use of the understanding, and cannot even meet all the wants of the mere intellectual faculty, and man is not all intellect. The understanding is *his*, not *he* himself, and there is that in him which the apparatus provided for the use of the understanding does not at all satisfactorily serve. He lives partly—the truest men most—in realms where words have no more place than the hewers of wood and the drawers of water had in the inner sanctuary. Why, at times, even *silence* is more expressive than any choicest words could be! There is, or ought to be, in all of us a Holy of Holies, for we were meant to be true temples of The Highest, and there the lips speak not. The heart (or soul) has a language of its own, and it is rather “sentient” than verbal. And God transcends the soul as Eternity transcends time. How, then, shall we define GOD!

Moreover, when, by means of prepared men, God had done for us all that words, Hebrew or Greek, could do, did He not teach us that all that was for us only while we were children? And did he not then try to reveal himself by a *Life*?—a life which no four evangelists could adequately set forth; no, nor forty times four! But when we use the word “life,” though we know partially what we mean, yet can any of us satisfactorily define it? I confess I cannot. How, then, I repeat, shall we define—GOD?

And yet, when we find that short monosyllable cover, or stand for, so many, often scarcely consentaneous, notions, it seems almost a painful necessity to try to point, though only as an index finger might—no more—the direction in which we mean that our thought is going.

The idea of God, then, is not a simple one, but very, very, complex.

Some men speak of *The Supreme Power*. Power is what they chiefly see, might. And their epithet for Him is The Almighty. Others, who see that power is by no means all that is manifested, nor even chief, speak of *The Supreme Intelligence*. Wisdom, skill, constructiveness, design, plan, are what they are impressed by. Yet, surely, goodness is often suggested by what meets the eye and appeals to the heart, and so some speak of *The Supreme Goodness*. Others, again, are more impressed by the demand all things in this ordered universe make for *righteousness*, and then we have "the tendency, or power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness." While yet there are other natures, tender, poetic, æsthetic, that are filled with the sense of beauty everywhere, and they name the unseen cause of all the loveliness that informs creation (as the soul informs the body), *The Supreme Beauty*, or the *All-Fair*. Then the receptive reader of certain ancient Hebrew writings feels sure that the final word has not yet been uttered; he is conscious of that profound and subtle and crowning moral beauty which he has learned to call Holiness, and so, with bowed head and finger on his lip, reverently pronounces the word—*All-Holy*!

Now we want a word which shall denote, not only all this, but how much more! For we have not mentioned *Truth*, nor *Love*. Neither have we spoken of *Self-subsistence*, nor the *Unbeginning One*, and have not uttered the familiar word (so easy for the mere lips), *The Infinite*. And where, in our English Bibles, we read THE LORD, the French read *l'Eternel*, which again conveys another idea than those we have already recognised. We want,

further, to include the idea of his *relationship* to his creatures, the just *authority* which He exercises and is bound to exercise, and the patience and forbearance and magnanimity and tenderness of that rule, with also the idea of *providence* and care for all creatures. I say, we want a word (*i.e.*, some of us do) to convey all this, and unutterably more ; and we say, GOD ! But there is no especial charm, except for English ears, in an English word ; and a Hebrew, Sanscrit, Greek, Latin, or other word might do as well, if all were agreed to accept it. The Jew pronounces the word Jehovah, or Memra ; on the plains of India (in, possibly, the time of Moses) they said Dyaus, or Sky-Father ; the Greek might use the word Theos, the Roman Deus, the Frenchman Dieu, the German Gott, and so forth. But how shall we light upon a word that shall, perforce, convey at once and to all minds all that we want to include ?

And as yet, too, we have left our deepest want unspoken. There is something in our hearts that is not recognised and responded to by anything we have said yet. With all the above in our minds we are still waiting for some one to speak a nearer, happier name yet. And I, for one, find the truest, happiest insight of all exhibited in that land which the world has come to call significantly the Holy Land. Said Philip, speaking for his brethren around him, and for how many everywhere, Lord, show us *the Father*, and it sufficeth us ! Let us place ourselves for an instant alongside of this child-like Galilean.

The plain, simple-minded, honest-hearted disciples of Jesus had, during the thirty months or so they had been with him, seen so much in him, and heard so much from him, that now, at the end, they seem to have

thought that he could do for them something that had perhaps never been done for man before. He, in his heavenly wisdom, had spoken so much to them of—not the Infinite, or the Absolute, or the Eternal, but—the Father; had so referred all his own wisdom and power to the Father; so assured them that the Father was ever with him; they had so heard him speak to the Father, and seem to receive such direct communications from Him,—that they thought it was within his power to “show them the Father,” as mortal man had never seen Him. Perhaps the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration was fresh upon their minds; and perhaps they thought, too, of the vision vouchsafed to Moses. I suppose they desired some transcendently glorious manifestation to the senses. For the bodily senses are so much to us, that, somehow, they colour all things to us; and many seem to think that satisfaction to the senses would be satisfaction indeed! Children that we are! We do not pause to reflect, else we should remember that none of the best and noblest things we know fall within the sphere of the senses. Show me the love of the devoted mother, the disinterestedness of the noble friend, the wisdom of the sage, the imperial imagination of the poet, the invincible faith and zeal of the martyr! Oh, you say, these cannot be shown in themselves, immediately to the eye, but only, through some medium, to the percipient mind. They can only be uttered in words, or, still better, manifested in deeds, in a life. What, then, you cannot show me these realities in themselves? No, you say, you cannot. Show me your own mind then, your own conscience, the well-spring of love within your own soul. Again, you tell me, I make an absurd demand. Yet people will

say, like Philip, Show us the Father ! They want—*i.e.*, some do—to see God with the bodily eyes, and think themselves hardly dealt with, almost defrauded of what they might reasonably expect, feel themselves put off, when told that that cannot be.

The feeling is immensely strong. In childhood it is, of course, imperious. The child says, Show ! show ! What it cannot see, or touch, or smell, or taste, is for it non-existent. And even when childhood has passed into youth, the early feeling retains its power ; and the youth or maiden who wants to be religious, and prays, experiences a painful difficulty in not having an external object pictured, if not before the bodily eye, yet at least before the mental ; wants a throne and one that sits thereon, before whom to bow, and towards whom to send their word. Spiritual culture alone gradually lifts them, if they persist and are progressive, out of this low-lying level of confused and misty thought, if indeed it can be called thought.

It is this same feeling that lies at the bottom of all the idolatries of the world, and all the image-and-picture worship of the two most corrupt Churches of Christendom. It grows out of the undue predominance of the senses ; and the more we live the life of the mere senses, the more apt we are secretly to sympathise with some such impossible demand as Philip made, and the less likely to look for, or indeed to care for, the only vision of God that is possible—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." It is the noblest in man to which alone the highest and grandest reality can appeal. The senses must learn to cease their too imperious self-assertion, must learn to hush, in order that the spirit in us may awake, that the conscience and the whole moral

nature may be alive, if we would begin to know God, and then follow on to know more and more, till at length we are flooded with the Divine presence, as the summer earth with sunshine, and for ever cease to cry, "Show us the Father!" because He has revealed himself to the filial spirit of his child.

Earlier in this Letter we recognised how—many-sided, may I say?—a Being God is, and that for the most part men lay hold of some one element in him to name Him by, as the Almighty, &c. And thus it is partly that arguments for the being of God so often fail to convince or touch an objector. The common word God is used indeed, but one man is thinking in one direction and the other in another. God being (if I may venture with all reverence to use the word) so many-sided, it often happens that one person means one thing by the name, while each of several others will mean something else. It is as if there were many different Gods, all called indiscriminately by the same name, so that men in using that one name in common get as confused as if all the various alphabetic sounds went under the breathing A.

Christianity has taught us to let the idea of the paternal have the predominance and colour the whole; when we think or speak of Him, the Christian's word is, "The Father," as it was ever Christ's.

At the beginning of this Letter I used the phrase "defining God." But let me now say that the idea is absurd, and I wish my readers deeply to feel that it is so. For, compared with the reality, how poor is the definition of anything beyond a table or a chair. If you have ever felt the power of affecting the soul there is in the *ocean*, for instance, how you turn away from

any offered verbal definition of it! All very well, you say, in a physical-geography lesson, but pray do not disturb my deepest and best feelings of the sea by your petty definitions. Or what lexicographer can define *poetry*? Well does a writer, in the *Spectator* of the day on which I write this, say of poetry, "This Divine art never has been, and never will be, properly defined." This witness is true. Or, when you deeply feel the omnipresent *life* there is all about you, and are lost in the contemplation of its manifoldness of manifestation, and with almost awe recognise the profound mystery of it all, say whether any definition of what you mean by *life* is possible. For myself, I answer, No. How, then, define God? It is inexpressibly and eternally impossible. Therefore, while having reluctantly yielded to the necessity of saying something of what I mean by GOD, let me now suggest that (as analysis should ever be for the sake of a happier synthesis sooner or later) the best thing we can do is to let all too clear-cut notions, all crystallisations of mere fragmentary parts of the whole idea, resolve themselves back again into the unformed (or unformulated), and let the sacred name stand to us for infinitely more than Supreme Power, Intelligence, Wisdom, Holiness, Love, &c.—the infinite ocean of essential being and abysmal deep of personality, the universal poetry of eternity, the invisible and inexhaustible fountain of all life and law, the unbeginning progenitor of all love, the mysterious power of all thought, of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things, whom no name can be adequate to, so that the best and holiest must be understood to have at the back of it an infinitude of, for creatures, the unknown and unknowable for ever. Still,

as we want to speak of Him, we must have a name, and fall back with gladness on that Christ gave us—The Father!

It is claimed for Christ that all the previous manifold attempts on the part of God at self-manifestation to his creatures came to a climax and consummation in him. They led up to and culminated in him, so that he could say, "No one cometh unto the Father but by me." He did not say that without him the mathematician could not come to the conception of a Supreme Geometer, or the mechanician conclude that there was a Supreme Designer; but he did say that to bring men to know God as THE FATHER was the crowning glory of his life on earth. And he did this partly by teaching, still more by doing, or acting and enduring; in a word by BEING.

"And so the Word had breath, and wrought  
With human hands the creed of creeds  
In loveliness of perfect deeds,  
More strong than all poetic thought."

Of his words take one as a specimen. He one day looked round on men and women, and straightway appealed to their deepest and purest affection—the parental. He brought to their minds their homes, with their olive-plants round about their table, their little Reubens and Benjamins, their Rachels and Rebekhas, and appealed to them whether they would let their darlings ask in vain for bread or meat; and when the moisture stood in every mother's eye, and the father felt a choking in his throat at the thought, he told them—what "Natural Religion," indeed, might have hoped, might have divined, but hardly dared affirm (though, perhaps, it ought)—that God was infinitely more of a

Parent than they could even guess at. In other words, he gave his sanction to the belief that all the best and purest and noblest in our affections—*all that is good in us—is a perennial revelation of God in our souls.* Verily, in a degree, the Word is fractionally made flesh wherever beats a true human heart. For that is what it amounts to, and his blessed saying reaches far, warranting a good deal more than he used it for at the moment. He abounded in words of that same quality—words which this poor world was waiting for some one to speak, such a one as Socrates felt sure must sooner or later come. And when he uttered them in his spontaneous way, as the sparkling fountain utters its silver music, simple, unsophisticated men and women forthwith saw and felt that they were true, that they deserved to be true, and must be true; and never dreamed of asking him to go with them to the great college at Jerusalem, and “prove” their truth to the satisfaction of the grey-beard jot-and-tittle men and mere word-and-particle grinders there. Peter felt no misgivings as to what men who had grown old in verbal quibblings might say, but spoke out what he and his honest-minded brethren felt—Thou hast words of Eternal Life!

Years after the Christ had disappeared from this realm of the senses, one of his most devoted servants—and the most devoted only can know such a one as Christ best—said he was “the image of the invisible God.” If the eternal God could focus all his moral being in a human life, He would live just such a life as Christ lived, deal with different characters as Christ dealt with them, say just the things Christ said. The proportion of all the revealable characteristics of

God, and their symmetry, Christ displayed in his life, in such manner that really to see him was, practically, for all purposes of religion and life, as good as seeing God—*was* to “see God.” So that John was right when in his old age he wrote, He that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. (Mem.—Our translators have quite needlessly put this clause in italics, as I have said before.)

Here possibly some might wish to say, Yes, if we indeed believe in Christ, we cannot but acknowledge God ; but how do you get your Christ? A very fair question, and one I wish to do my best to answer, although the answer, if given here, would make this Letter very much too long, and be too much of a digression. Let us postpone it, therefore, and make it the subject of our next Letter, turning back just now for a moment to the thought we had been suggesting.

I call Christ the shortest way to God ; not meaning, thereby, a metaphysical God at all, but sympathising heartily with Niebuhr, when he wrote : “I have often said that I do not know what to do with a metaphysical God, and that I will have none, with the God of the Bible, who is heart to heart with us.” Let any one try the experiment with himself of believing in Christ (quite in a general way only, and without troubling himself for the time with anything that is questionable), and he will find that with Christ, God—or let me speak as Christ spoke, and say, the Father—has somehow come. I think it would be very hard—of course, I cannot say impossible—to believe (quite generally, as I said) in Christ, and yet doubt whether the Father, of whom he was always speaking, and to whom he referred all his

wisdom and power, really existed ! The spirit of doubt, in such a case, must have been so heartily welcomed into the heart, one thinks, so cordially honoured as THE Spirit *par excellence*, that all capacity is for a time benumbed, except the capacity for doubting. Some portions of that man's nature, I should think, have been over-stimulated and fed, and others as unduly neglected and starved. If I were a physician for the mind (or soul), I would prescribe comparative abstinence for a time from those pursuits which tend only to make one hard-headed—though, God knows, we have plenty who come under a very different category ;—I would suggest that mere school logic (though not to be undervalued) is not the only organon for the attainment of truth ; and would propose that the soul dose itself with some of our noblest poets, and that the heart should drench itself with full draughts of pure affection and that true love which laughs at the limit of threescore years and ten. Art even will do more than the syllogism towards preparing the soul for noble beliefs. The true man is man and woman both, and if he have hitherto thought it fine to be above all things masculine, let him now do himself the justice of cultivating the feminine side of his nature—which is also the poetic—and possibly he may come to find that :

“ Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God ;  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries,  
And daub their natural faces unaware,  
More and more from the first similitude.”

Yes, true poetry and noble love may help one somewhat to see, and know, and appreciate the Christ ; for religion, while perfectly competent to occupy in turn

every professor's chair in all the schools, wears her heavenliest robes, and speaks and looks more graciously, and bears herself more winsomely, under the blue sky, with the lilies of the field about her, and pure-hearted maidens and fond mothers with their children, than in the used-up atmosphere where the eye rests on desks and stools, and faces far gone towards parchment. There is deep truth in Holman Hunt's picture of the boy-Christ in the temple, with the blear-eyed rabbis poring over their too exclusively-cherished scrolls. He has come from the Galilean hills and the valley of Esdraelon, from the idyllic scenes which the Song of Songs has made familiar, and his look is far away towards the blue waters of the Sea of Galilee, which nightly reflects the mystic stars, while his hair still tells of the invigorating breeze; and they—who does not pity *them*?

Let happen what may to the lifeless and heartless and dry formulas and (so to speak) diagrams of God, fit only for the black board of the lecture-room; or let who will parade the meant-to-be-profound abstractions of the Dry-as-dusts who could "peep and botanise e'en on a mother's grave"; only leave us our noble and beautiful Christ (more beautiful than any Scandinavian Balder, or Grecian Phœbus Apollo), and we will let all the talk about The Absolute, and The Unconditioned, and The Unknown, and Unknowable, pass by us as of little more preciousness than the abracadabra which let who will still conjure with, while we sit at the feet of him who can ever tell us more and more of THE FATHER.

NO. XI.

*HOW DO WE "GET OUR CHRIST"?*

WE recognised in the last Letter, that, for those who have come to acknowledge Christ, he is the best, the easiest, the directest, and happiest way to God—*i.e.*, to belief in God (meaning thereby the best of all *external* ways to God, when God is regarded as a Being external to us; a saving clause, I feel bound to insert just here, although the explanation of the deep truth intended must be postponed). But at this point the conviction is forced upon us that some will wish to press the previous inquiry, that, *viz.*, with which we have headed the present Letter.

Yet to others it may seem most strange that there can be any question at all about it. They will say, How do we get our Christ, indeed? Why, we have him in the Four Gospels, to be sure!

And we might, perhaps, in our weary hours or indolent moods, almost envy the dear simple souls who thus, with child-like unsuspectingness, find their Lord in the Evangelists. We look upon them as men worn with the world's work and worry and unscrupulous antagonisms often look upon the fair face of some happy child, and give one long but vain sigh to the memory of their own early days. But, after all, true manhood is nobler

than ignorant and untried childhood. And while the Christian who has had to work and toil and fight for the faith he prizes so dearly, finds it all the truer and more precious for all that it has cost him, he knows also that there is possible to him "the sweet recovered infancy of faith ;" and while now he has the disciplined strength of the veteran, whose "helm has worn his aged temples bare," he is conscious, too, of having regained the child's heart ; and whatever may be the case with the mere physical nature, yet the "second childhood," into which the spiritual man often passes before bidding farewell to his native earth, is beyond all comparison with the facile faith of his early days, when belief might so easily have slid unawares into credulity, and religion into superstition. It must not, then, stagger the young Christian who is so happy in his belief, that when he says he finds his Christ in the Four Gospels, others will rejoin, All very well, but how do you get your Four Gospels, then ?

I cannot at present go at any length into this latter question, but I do want to lay down one or two broad lines of thought touching the former.

How may we get our Christ ?

First of all, let me ask you to recognise that there is in the world that which we all call *Christianity*. Granted, that it is a somewhat vague term ; but, though vague, everybody that uses the word means something by it. And we find that, for the most part, people do not hesitate to say, *This* is not Christianity, and *That* is not Christianity. Everybody almost decides promptly as by some dumb but sure instinct what is, and what is not, consistent with Christianity. Also, he does not scruple to say of a man professing religion whom he

has detected in some unworthy conduct, He call himself a Christian ! A pretty Christian he is, indeed ! So that you will always find, whenever a man has not already brought himself unhappily to pose as an opponent to Christianity, that when he says, This, or that, is not genuine Christianity, he has put his finger on something that his moral sense disapproves ; and when he pronounces some ostentatious "professor" no Christian, he touches some blot. Very well, I see that, just as when a man pronounces that something is beautiful, he has some prior sense of beauty by which he judges in the individual instance, so, when he pronounces an action, or an institution, or a person not to be Christian, he has some prior though possibly vague sense of what Christianity is, although he may no more have made it thoroughly clear and distinct to himself than he has sharply defined to himself what beauty is.

I say, then, strip off from all that passes as Christianity whatever in your own heart you instinctively feel to be contrary to its spirit, and you have as a residuum the purest and noblest and happiest of all that the world ever had in a religion yet, or is ever likely to have. Somehow, it will be, perhaps, in your own mind more of a spirit, not to be made very definite, than a form. It may indeed be formless as the light, or as music, or as fragrance ; indefinite as nobleness or love ; but still very real. Now, I think you will then find that Christianity thus conceived of, condenses, shall I say ? or crystallises, into a *Person*. For the only account that can be given of it is that, somehow, it is to be traced to Christ ; and the one true and only sufficient representation of Christianity is Christ him-

self, with whom it originated. By universal consent, no Christian comes up to Christ.

Now we have a good deal of quite reliable information about Mahomet, the founder of Mahometanism; so we have about Sakya-Mouni, the founder of Buddhism, several centuries before Christ, and in a country much more remote from our western world than Judea, which in Christ's time was a province of the Roman Empire, and thus thoroughly within the domain of history. I think I know Mahomet fairly well, and I know enough about Sakya-Mouni to make me think highly of him and love him. I am quite sure scholarly men know Socrates quite as well as they know William the Conqueror, or Harold, the last of the Saxons. Plato, Aristotle, &c. (who lived as long before Christ as Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets), are as well known as Chaucer and Bacon, and thus, surely, it is no very great presumption in us Christians to say we know our Lord. Merely resolve Christianity into its Founder, and already we know much. By Christianity we know Christ.

Then, of course, of necessity, there must be *some* trustworthy accounts of him transmitted from his contemporaries. It cannot be that we know so well so many men centuries farther back than Christ, and yet that of *him* we have no reliable history. That would not be credible. And, then, who does not know that we must find nearly all we can ascertain in the New Testament? Whatever our theory about the book, or the several writers of it, we are shut up to that. There is our quarry. Thence, or nowhere, must we learn all that is learnable of one who, whatever he was, was at least the Founder of that Christianity which, in itself,

stripped of its unworthy associations, is synonymous with purity, disinterestedness, unselfishness, devotedness to right, consummate and perfect goodness, and holiness.

Now, at this point, I regret that I must make a break. Having got thus far, we must make another beginning. For when I open the New Testament, in company with some very clever men of the present day, in order to get my full and clear portraiture of the Christ, they forthwith stop my hand and shut the book, saying there is a good deal in it that they cannot admit. They cannot admit, for instance, that Christ ever rose from the dead so as actually to be seen and heard by his disciples. Oh! I say, then I presume there is much else told in the Four Gospels that you throw overboard also? And they assure me that there is; and that they do, and must, reject all that is akin to the accounts of his resurrection. Oh, oh! I say, then you will not let me go straight to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to get my idea of the Christ? Well, if I cannot get to my journey's end by one road, I suppose I must try another, that's all. A little more trouble; but perhaps one is none the worse for having to make one's fortune instead of too easily inheriting it without having worked for it with hand and brain. In all labour there is profit, says Solomon.

Ay, and now I see too that after all it is best *not* to begin with the Four Gospels.

Almost everything—or, at least, so much—hinges on the question, Did Christ rise from the dead, or did he not? If he did not, we shall, of course, have to take the Evangelists, not merely *cum grano*, but *cum multis granis*, or rather *cum plurimis*. We shall have to use

the scissors at a fine rate ; or, as it will come more natural to some of us to use the pen, we shall have to take the pen, and having well filled our inkstand with the very blackest ink, draw our pen through sentences after sentences, and paragraphs after paragraphs, till we could write all that remains, not indeed on a fourpenny-piece, but almost on the palm of one's hand. Well, if it must be, it must. The truth is best. Nay, the truth alone is good. But, really, just as if some one were to demand my purse, I should not surrender it without at least some effort to retain it, so this (hitherto to me) *fact* of the resurrection of Christ is not to be lightly abandoned, however peremptory the demand, or formidable the opponent.

Some of us have long seen that the greatest struggle of all would, sooner or later, take place round the tomb—I say the forsaken tomb—of Christ. And the struggle has come ; and not only come, but the impugnors of the resurrection say that it is over, too, and they already claim the victory ! Their trumpets sound jubilantly along the whole line, and they boast that the day is won ! Yet, somehow, we do not feel that we have lost it. Those notes of triumph seem to us somewhat premature, for we have not, that we are aware of, lost a foot of ground, nor a single flag. This last Easter Sunday, we sang our Easter Hymn quite as confidently as ever. So that "our friends, the enemy," as the polite Frenchman said, only *think* they have conquered. However, they do think so ; and as we think very confidently otherwise, we simply say so. We Christians are thoroughly English, and like those British soldiers of whom Napoleon said, "Those English do not know when they are beaten !" I, for one, having read the

latest book written to prove that Christ no more rose from the dead than the man I buried last week in the Maidstone cemetery, am not a whit shaken in my belief—a belief as certain (to me) as any I have.

If Christ did not rise from the dead, but was in all respects—in all his personal history, and everything—just such a man as I am (save that he was exceptionally good), and no more gave sight to the blind, or cleansed the leper, or hushed the storm, or raised the dead than I can, why, it is plain that my idea of him cannot be the same as if the records of him in the Gospels are, in the main, true. And thus it is that, in order to "get our Christ," we have to satisfy ourselves [mind, I say *ourselves*, not others], whether, or not, he did rise from the dead. This, because so much else is involved in it.

And let none of those for whom I write be perplexed by the fact that many clever men to-day are confident that they have given the *coup de grace* to our Christian faith in this matter. For more than eighteen centuries now it has been affirmed and believed by the whole Christian Church, and for as long a period it has been denied by some. So it is nothing new. The faith in a risen Lord has spread throughout the world, not because antagonism was wanting, but in the face of persistent and often deadly opposition.

The tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, was not planted in a hothouse, but out in the open, where it has been exposed to all the winds that blow, and assailed by many a storm. Still, we say, its leaves are green, and still it bears twelve manner of fruits most pleasant to the taste, most refreshing and life-giving to the soul. But still our cry, "The Lord is risen indeed," is met by the counter-cry, "The Lord is *not* risen."

Nor is this anything to be surprised at. Always there are minds which are more open to the sense of difficulty and to negative conclusions than to positive ones. It is, too, by far the easiest line to take. Often a child will ask a question, or raise a difficulty, which it would require much time and patience and painstaking to answer properly. Pilate asked in three words, What is truth? Could even the Christ have answered in as few? Nay, could he have answered the question at all to such a man as Pilate was?

Moreover, to-day, the very great advance made, and so happily for the world, by science, has impregnated the very air (so to speak) with certain scientific or semi-scientific elements and methods that were never before present in so much force; so that even the non-scientific are, almost unconsciously, open to that sense of difficulty about some things which science awakens so decidedly in her earnest votaries. *We* ask scientific questions about "miracles," which were not dreamt of in the pre-scientific ages. While, too, the vast number of what some of us cannot but deem outrageously absurd things, gravely reported by men and women of quite average ability and unimpeachable character—some of them of more than average ability—and readily believed by others, has, no doubt, additionally tended to bring into greater disrepute all records of whatever transcends the common experience and the commonly recognised domain of law.

We may regret this state of things, but we must accept it. The opponents of Historical Christianity—(I say "Historical," because some of them earnestly, and I have no doubt as honestly, profess their desire to retain, to "save," as they say, "Spiritual Christianity,"

meaning thereby some of the alleged words of Christ)—tell us that in the next generation, or at all events in the following, belief in the resurrection of Christ will not be so much as possible to anybody! In the days of our children, or at least our children's children, the story of the resurrection, they say, will be classed by all the world among the delusions once honestly but ignorantly held. It is to vanish like a ghost at cock-crow.

Let me frankly state at once that questions may be easily asked about the resurrection which I at least cannot answer. But then in this we are only on common ground. Of how much, that we are nevertheless constrained to believe every day of our lives, is this true also. For minds like ours, some mist of ignorance must surround almost everything but the multiplication-table. And the unknown is not to throw discredit on the known. If a thing be true, no amount of objection can be of any real weight against it.

Now about the resurrection of Christ, let me state briefly what I mean by it. I mean, then, that that Jesus who was crucified and reported dead by the Roman officer on duty at the execution, having been pierced in the side (the pericardium at least, if not the heart itself) by a soldier's spear, re-appeared, after lying in the tomb for six and thirty hours, and showed himself alive to many, sometimes in Jerusalem, sometimes in Galilee, and elsewhere; that he ate and drank in their presence, conversed with them pretty plentifully (conversations themselves for the most part not reported except a fragment or two), and gave them instructions what to do; that, by-and-by—*i.e.*, at the end of forty days—he ceased to be seen of them, but, unseen, still co-operated with them in their work, that work being really his, and they

only his agents, servants. He was the same Jesus they had known from the beginning, but his identity allowed of considerable change ; about which I may have my thoughts, my speculations, but am not warranted in laying down the law.

Now you must understand and keep in mind that all (or nearly all) who deny the resurrection of our Lord, also deny, *in toto*, "the supernatural." I have put the word, you see, in inverted commas, for it is not a word I use by choice ; and, until a writer or speaker has defined it, a good deal of misconception must always ensue from its use. I must know perfectly all that is comprehended under the term nature, before I can have any true notion of what is above nature, or whether, indeed, anything, or being, is above it. Nature, and therefore the natural, *may be* so defined as to include all I care to contend for under the head of supernatural. So that in this present discussion, if I use the word at all, I do so under almost a modified protest, and mean thereby such events as the resurrection of Christ, and the other remarkable events narrated by the Evangelists ; but I would rather avoid using the word. However, the reader will understand what I mean when I say that, for the most part, all those who deny the resurrection of Christ, do also deny the truth of all else that they call supernatural ; as, for instance, that Christ healed the leper, restored sight to the blind, stilled the tempest, fed the multitude, and the like.

And, further, they have also, for the most part, so parted with, or attenuated, the idea of God, as that we feel that they retain no God of any account (*i.e.*, to us), no Supreme Intelligence for the intellect, no Moral

Governor for the conscience, no Heavenly Father for the heart, and no watchful Providence for the daily life of the individual, the nation, and the world. For the most part (there are admirable exceptions) they eliminate God altogether (except in name), or put Him out of the realm of thought and of everyday life. So that the denial of Christ's resurrection is never a thing by itself, but part of a complete system of—what else can I call it? but—unbelief. Of course, some have also their own system of positive belief, too. I am far enough from intimating that some of them have not quite possibly a faith as satisfactory to them as ours is to us; I only want to convey distinctly what they themselves take no pains to conceal, that their rejection of the resurrection grows out of the previous rejection of a good deal else, or else involves it. And, indeed, it cannot be otherwise. If you could abolish the sun, you could hardly retain the planetary system; but with the greater orb his circum-revolving worlds would go too.

Remember, then, that the impugnors of the resurrection have abandoned, and do cut out from the Evangelists a very great deal besides that, though, when they deliver their assault on this point, they often keep in the background their deepest and most real reasons, and put forward only what they deem sufficient to disconcert and silence the believer who clings to a risen Christ.

## NO. XII.

### HOW DO WE "GET OUR CHRIST"?

(CONTINUED).

A CHRIST of whom what the Four Evangelists have reported is *substantially* true—and, on the other hand, a Christ of whom you affirm that all their reports of his birth are fables, with no syllable of truth in them ; and all their statements of his resurrection mere fancies and utterly baseless ; and all accounts of his healing the leper, giving sight to the blind, controlling the winds and waves, and so forth, pure fictions ; and that after he was laid in the grave there was no more seen or heard of *him* really than there was of the last man hanged at Newgate—are, to my mind, very like two distinct and dissimilar Christs. For I find so many precious traits of character, and so many priceless words of his, vitally bound up with these records, that the mutilated story seems to me to leave but a mutilated Christ. I know, indeed, that they who thus freely use the unrelenting scissors with these narratives lay all the stress of Christianity (as they understand it) on the words of truth that Christ is still *reported* to have uttered. They think they find so much spiritual force and life and beauty in the few truths which remain, and which as they say, verify themselves, or can be

verified by all who will, that they can afford not to care what becomes of the main bulk of the story of the Christ as told by the Evangelists. Some who speak thus are not enemies but friends, who find themselves still so spiritually rich when they have blotted out all such accounts as would difference Jesus of Nazareth from any English Smith or Brown of to-day, except in moral excellence, that they seem hardly able to appreciate *how much* feebler and less robust and independent disciples, like myself, feel summoned to surrender when we are called to take back our Gospels with (shall I say?) seven-tenths of the contents blotted out, and are bidden to believe that the very last words ever really heard from the lips of Christ were those he uttered on the cross, and the last that was ever seen of him was when the heavy stone was rolled to the mouth of the sepulchre where sorrowing affection had laid him ; so that when Caiaphas and the rest had had their wicked will on him to the uttermost, and went home to their dinners and their wines, with their revenge glutted to the full, there was an end of Christ's history in this world (or, indeed, in any other for aught that is known), and no authentic syllable or sign was ever heard of him after ! I ask, Did he go clean out of existence ? Did he utterly cease to be when he gave that terrible cry on the cross, and exclaimed, "It is finished !" and his head fell forward, and they all said, "He is dead" ? Did he perish out-and-out, or did he still live on ? Our friends of the scissors don't know. They may have their opinions. Guesses are free. If they have brought themselves to believe, on some grounds, quite independent of Scripture, that *all men's* existence is prolonged in some way after death, then they will believe that

Christ also, in some way, lived on. But if you ask them for a categorical reply to your question, they must say, We don't know !

Moreover, the principles on which the resurrection of Christ is discredited themselves prevent their holders from being able to say one word as to what happens, or may happen, when once the breath is gone out of the body. Making our present experience decide everything, nothing being to them credible but what can be scientifically proved to-day, their belief and their "religion" are necessarily limited to the present time and world. "The canons of criticism," "of history," "and of science" which they lay down, peremptorily cut us off from a future of any kind. *For if there is a future, how can it be verified now ?*

Let us understand. Over and over again there is for mortals in this state but a choice of difficulties. We said in an earlier Letter that it is the rarest thing in the world for us to have *absolute certainties* to go upon ; that *probabilities* instead—probabilities ranging from low to high, and very high, sometimes so high as to be next door to certainty—rule our lives and determine our conduct, even at the greatest crises, and when we are imperatively called on to decide and act. We crave for perfect light, and find that we have to acquiesce in something very far short of that indeed. We can walk, however, by star-light, if it must be so ; and if even that fail us some poorer light may yet be found. Juries give verdicts that will transfer a hundred thousand pounds from one man to another, that will brand this man as a criminal, or consign that to the gallows, on evidence never so complete and perfect but that a very third-rate barrister can easily

find flaws or weak places in it, or urge a good deal against the unanimous decision of the Court. The man must be a fool who cannot find or make reasons for disbelieving anything whatever that you may be seeking to establish, and which he does not care to receive. If a man says to me, I won't believe this or that unless you bring me not merely a high degree of probability, such as would warrant a jury in delivering a verdict, but absolute certainty, such as would compel the most resolutely unwilling to believe—all I can say to him is, Very well, then, I must leave you to believe as you like.

And, then, I think the denial theory has quite as great difficulties to get over as ever we have. It is all very well to sit in an easy-chair and point out that the various little fragments which the Evangelists have given us as to the circumstances of the resurrection, or the occurrences of the day, do not fit well together. The case does not rest on their fitting together like a piece of joiner's work. But we say, Just give us your own account of how it came about that all the apostles and all the other disciples believed that their Lord was risen, and that they spoke with him, and he with them. For it is now universally admitted that all the first Christians *did* believe that, and the old infidel theory that they were a set of conscious impostors is abandoned on all sides. The rejectors of the Resurrection now attempt to account for the story that was so soon afloat, and so heartily credited, by one or other of two hypotheses.

Mr. Gregg has quite lately revived the theory which Dr. Paulus had made popular with a class in the last century—viz., that Christ did not actually die when he

seemed to, but only swooned away, and in that state of supposed death was laid in the tomb, and where the quiet and the freshness and the odour of the spices restored him to consciousness, so that he came forth and presented himself to his amazed and delighted disciples, who forthwith announced to the world that he had risen from the dead ! I confess I was surprised to see in the *Contemporary*, a few months back, this (as I had thought) long-exploded theory. If Christ had not died, and yet let the apostles tell the world that he had risen from the dead, he simply acquiesced in and encouraged a lie ! Wrap it up as you will, that is what it amounts to, and plain speaking is not only best, but, especially when morals are involved, imperative. In this case, he and his tools were a set of impostors, whom no religious zeal or high-sounding utterances can absolve ; neither can any good results that may be alleged whitewash their names.

But I think if my readers will, by a trifling exercise of the imagination, try to realise all that is involved in this notion, they will need no word of mine. I picture to myself a man, who, after a life of unrelenting labour, ending in a night spent in the guard-room, and being hurried from one tribunal to another, had been first severely scourged and then nailed to the cross, and had finally been pierced in the side by a spear (so that there had come forth from the pericardium blood and water), and had been lying for six-and-thirty hours in the sepulchre without food or drink, slowly reviving in the gloom ; painfully getting down from the ledge of the rock where they had lain him, though swathed in linen bands ; feebly trying to push down the great stone that had been rolled to the door ; coming forth

pale, emaciated, tottering, scattering the guard of Roman legionaries ; and crawling as best he could to the place where his disciples were secretly hiding for fear of the Jews, &c., &c., &c. Need I complete the picture? And then they all with one consent reported that a miracle had been wrought, and that he had come forth in resurrection splendour, the Conqueror of Death, and the true and rightful Lord of men! Why, the proper place for such men would be the dock and the treadmill. No, friends ; the crudest conceptions of the resurrection are surely better—*i.e.*, have more verisimilitude—than a notion which founds a Christendom on a Jewish "*Claimant!*"

The other hypothesis is far more respectable. It supposes that, in the highly-wrought mental condition in which the mourning disciples were, they could not bring themselves finally to rest in the belief that it was all over with their dear Lord and Master, and that they must see him no more ; and so, when once the idea was suggested that he *must* still be living, it was eagerly welcomed, and loving hearts and excited imaginations did the rest. They *fancied* that they still saw him, and that he spoke to them in the old familiar tones ; for how could it but be that that voice should still sound in their ears, that face still haunt their vision? And so they outwardised in an historical form their own inward fancies, or subjective experiences. And so, at a later day, with Saul of Tarsus ; what passed in his mightily-moved soul (for it has to be assumed that he was inwardly exercised, and that in an extraordinary degree) seemed to him to have come to him as outward phenomena.

This theory, as held by its devouter adherents,

acquits the apostles of all conscious dishonesty, and admits the possible reality of spiritual action on them (or in them), from the super-sensual world (if there be one), whither the Christ had (perhaps?) gone. And they back up this explanation by great acuteness in the detection of difficulties (insuperable, as they allege), in the way of so putting together all the evangelical statements of the circumstances of the resurrection as that they shall make one consistent whole, which will, as we say, hold water. And they add certain psychological considerations in favour of their hypothesis, and certain physiological objections to the notion of a literal resurrection, and so, *voilà !* they relieve, as they think, "spiritual Christianity" from an incubus, which to them seems no longer endurable. But the more candidly they show their whole hand, the more clearly do they let us see that they have been mainly prompted to adopt this line by *the foregone conclusion that nothing of the "miraculous" is admissible on any terms ;* so that they are irresistibly goaded to exercise all possible ingenuity in picking holes in all the evidence that goes to establish the literal resurrection from the dead of the Christ who was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. They must, therefore, believe that if the disciples, or the Jewish authorities, had really gone to the sepulchre, the body of Jesus would still have been found there, already in a state of incipient decay. If, therefore, the apostles had the hardihood to proclaim that he had risen from the dead, the malignant scribes and Pharisees, with the acute and worldly-minded Sadducees, would only have had to produce the corpse to the people, and they would have silenced the disciples for ever, who would have been openly convicted

of being mere idle visionaries and dreamers, if not something worse. Surely there were in Jerusalem wits keen enough, and shrewd practical common-sense men enough, to have hit on that most natural means in the world of putting a stop to that foolish report that the impostor and blasphemer they had crucified was risen from the dead.

For my own part, I believe with all my heart and all my mind the story as it appears in the pages of the New Testament. I do not think that our knowledge of physiology, psychology, pneumatology, ontology, or any other ology, is so complete and perfect as to warrant our saying that *no evidence whatever could make the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead credible*. And if in the nature of things it is *not an impossibility*, then I, for one, find in the unquestionable facts of the history of Christianity, as well as in the apostolic writings, more than enough to impel me still to sing our Easter hymn with no faltering in my voice, no misgiving in my heart.

I do not begin my statement of the case with any attempt to put together the various items of information found at the end of each of the Four Gospels. That is not how my faith began at the first, and has been growing since.

To me the evangelical story, first of all, verifies itself inwardly, and then is adequately supported by external testimony. I feel the invincible force that there is in that word which Luke reports to have been uttered by Christ—"Thus it behoved" (xxiv. 44—48). And the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (ii. 10 and 17) was evidently under the influence of the same mighty sense of *becomingness*, and even *behovedness*, when he wrote,

"For it became him for whom are all things," &c. ; and, "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made," &c.

You see, friends, believing happily, and finding it life eternal to believe, in a PERFECT GOD, in whose image I am in some sense made, so that at all events all the little imperfect best in me is a faint reflection of, or even impartation from, the immeasurable and perfect good in Him ; a God whose very living image Christ was ; a God who is Our Father, so that, whatever infinitude of Godhood there may be behind, He is pleased to put (so to speak) his veritable Fatherhood in front thereof, thus covering (if I may say so) all that which is necessarily beyond the creature's grasp or ken or thought, by a Father's *Face*, the play of whose features, happily somewhat seen by the *filial* and pure heart, reveals the Father's heart—believing, I say, in the God whom Nature and the Bible, and my own soul (with its moral sense, and its mighty affections, and its aspirations and yearnings), and especially Christ, have helped me, however inadequately, to know, so that I am sure my creaturely error concerning him is the error of defect—I say, believing so, I believe—I think I *see* even—much more.

I believe that to educate and train his children is an object worthy of Him who alone knows to what glorious moral heights we are capable of being led, and how it is quite within the possible for us ultimately to become perfectly conformed to the image of his Son, and to stand before him faultless, then really entering on our true career, for which all the teaching and discipline of time was meant to prepare us. I believe that all this fair outward universe is but the theatre, or home, or nursery and gymnasium of his young immortals ; and

that, if it could be regarded as a thing apart, and unconnected and alone, the sun itself, ay, and the solar system, ay, and the whole of the stellar universe itself, would not weigh in the balance with the worth of a single soul (or mind). I believe that great word spoken so long ago that—however long his minority might last—man was made to be the lord of what we call nature, and that all things were put under his feet ; some glimmering of the meaning of which we have attained to in our day, and of which Christ, the one true and proper man, the second Adam, gave some manifestations by the lordship he occasionally asserted, and which (properly speaking) *natural* supremacy, being in our dimness of vision and shortsightedness, pronounced by us "*supernatural*," forsooth, we, some of us, find incredible. Ah, I think we should see better if we were not so pro-di-gious-ly clever !

Well, then, believing all this, when the general story of the Christ is put before me—seeing also what led up to it, and what has (incipiently) resulted from it ; feeling to the full the significance of the letters B.C. and A.C.—I having no *à priori* difficulties, scientific or moral, in the way of believing whatever to my awakened soul seems worthy of such a God—can, with all my heart, and soul, and mind, hail the idea of a Risen Lord, who, having passed through those grim experiences from which human nature shrinks—*i.e.*, having died—has reappeared in his integrity, individually the same, and recognisably so, and showing in his own person the glorious capabilities which are folded up within ourselves.

Neither am I believing in this veritable resurrection from the dead merely because the belief is pleasant, nor

only because to me it seems in perfect keeping and congruity with all else that I believe. When my understanding wants a justification of what my soul embraces, what my spirit sees, I find such satisfaction ready to my hand.

Here is Christendom. As you trace a river to its source, so can we trace Christianity and the Church back to the first age. No one disputes that within twenty or twenty-five years after Jesus of Nazareth had been put to death as a malefactor, dying on the slave's cross, there were little communities formed, not only throughout Judea and Samaria, but in all the great centres of civilisation and commerce throughout the Roman Empire. We know something of them from Roman writers, for, from the circumstances of the case, the Roman authorities had soon to take cognizance of them. Making allowances for the haughty and contemptuous feelings with which a Roman noble or gentleman would inevitably regard a set of "low" mechanics and others who had presumed to throw off their allegiance to their country's gods, and dared to adopt a "*religio illicita*," we gather that these followers of "one Christus" whom P. Pilatus had scourged and crucified, were harmless in their lives, and of blameless character, except for their culpable "obstinacy" in refusing, even under peril of being thrown to the lions, to burn incense to the gods. We learn that they used to sing hymns to Christ as God, and pledge one another to abstain from all forms of evil and to do good. These communities spread, in spite of sometimes severe persecution, till the heathen temples began to be deserted, and complaints arose that "religion" was endangered. Long before the first century after

the death of Christ, Christians and Christianity were everywhere known.

But had these numerous communities (churches) no literature of their own? Had they no authentic account of themselves, fuller and more reliable than Pliny or Tacitus could get at? Most unquestionably. Within, say twenty-five years after Christ had been crucified, there were in the possession of several of these churches letters addressed to them by the most famous of all the zealous missionaries of the new faith, and the planter of most of their fraternities. These letters are extant, and we have them, and keen and searching as has been the criticism expended on the writings of the New Testament, some of the epistles of Apostle Paul have never been called in question even by the most hostile. Now, for our present purpose we will lay no claim to any special "inspiration" in the composition of these writings, but will simply take them as genuine documents, being just what they profess to be; and, as such, no scholar will pretend that they are not at least as good as the Letters of Pliny or the Annals of Tacitus.\* For our purpose, indeed, they must be incomparably better; for their author knew all about the subject-matter of his Epistles, and had had to suffer so much for his advocacy of what he deemed all-important truth, that mere self-interest alone would have sharpened his faculties to detect anything that would have been of a character to excuse his sacrificing himself and all that is dear to a man in this world for aught that was in any degree questionable. If I am to be tied up and flogged, I don't know how often, and after all to be hung up like a dog, for asserting a certain something to be true, depend upon it I shall look uncommonly well to the

evidences of that which is going to cost me so dear. I need not refer to the personal history of the Apostle ; everybody knows it. He wrote these Epistles to churches which were as dear to him as children to a father. He loved them for their own sakes ; but he loved them first for Christ's sake.

No mortal that ever lived called forth such enthusiasm for himself as Paul and his brother Christians exulted to feel for Christ. Words could not sufficiently testify their love ; their property, their liberty, their bodies, their lives, were valued chiefly as something that they could offer up in joyous self-sacrifice to him whom they hailed as Saviour, Redeemer, Lord, the Prince of Life, the Lord of Glory. They called him Saviour because they had experienced his saving power. They had been lifted up, some of them from the lowest depths of moral degradation, and were living on a level of conscious experience which they once could not have believed to be possible for them. Their consciences were at peace. They exulted in God. They were full of holy joy. They loved one another, and, strange to say, they were able to do what no code of morals hitherto had dreamed of prescribing, viz., love their enemies ! A quite new life was being consciously lived. And "base-born" mechanics, and slaves, and women were capable, as an every-day thing, of a calm and quiet heroism, which threw into the shade the courage of soldiers in the field. And they said they owed it all to Christ ! The music of his name had gone into their being. They were not now Jews, or Romans, or Corinthians in the first place, but, first of all, they were Christ's men. His image was graven on their hearts, his life seemed to course along their veins. Rather than

deny him, they gave their living and quivering flesh to the wild beasts in the arena, they let themselves be butchered to make a Roman holiday. Christ had somehow taken a hold on them unparalleled in history. And these men and women, still frail because still human, were trying to be good and right out-and-out, to be perfect even as Christ was perfect, to be holy as God is holy, and to become fit for a world where all is purity and light and love. Account for all this, now. You can't, of course, without help from the original source of all knowledge about them. This, then, is the only solution of the problem. They believed what the missionaries of Christ had communicated to them about Christ, and, after believing it, they found it must be true by the unspeakable blessedness of the result. They had the witness in themselves. They saw it to be truth by its own light. What, then, had these strangely devoted servants of Christ preached to them? Why, that Christ had died for their sins, and risen again on the third day. The resurrection of Christ from the dead was the great central truth, the keystone of the arch. *That* they made good first, and then dwelt on what preceded and led up to it, and what followed from it. See the Epistles everywhere, and recognise for yourselves that it was so. A risen Christ, who, being now alive for evermore, could and was ready to be, anxious to be, to any man or woman anywhere, all that he had ever been to John, or Peter, or Mary the Magdalene, or to this very Paul himself—a risen Christ—the one grandest and loveliest proof of all the love of God, this was the sum and substance of the Gospel that Paul preached, and his Epistles to the Churches are extant to prove it.

Here I may for the present break off; but I beg you

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to observe that we have got thus far without referring, as yet, to the historical fragments at the end of the Gospels. Still, I think you will feel with me that already we see plainly enough the direction in which we may find all we can want to justify the gladdest Easter Hymn we know.

NO. XIII.

*HOW DO WE "GET OUR CHRIST" ?*

(CONTINUED).

THAT every effect must have an adequate cause, is an assertion that none of my readers will call in question. The effect produced on the first generation of Christians (and running on for sixty generations more) must be accounted for. That effect we have slightly glanced at :—men and women belonging emphatically to "the people," peasants and mechanics, with not a few slaves, were raised out of the lowest depths of moral degradation (see 1 Cor. vi. 9—11), and had embraced an ideal of life such as philosophy had never dreamed of. For we know what the best philosophers before Christ had attained, and what was their highest aim, and that none of them ever contemplated affecting "the people," much less slaves. These were contemptibly beneath the consideration of philosophy, which was essentially aristocratic. Not only was Ethics without the idea of *Holiness*, but the model man of philosophy—its good-man, or wise-man—was still an imaginary one only; the living exemplar, in whom the best philosophy was embodied and illustrated by a life, was wanting. The best fell far below their own standard, while even that standard was a poor one beside the Christian. Yet

wherever Christ's servants preached, at hazard of their lives, there a sight was witnessed which the world had never seen before. Men and women, sunk in degradation, became chaste, pure, honest, forgiving, unselfish, ready to return good for evil, to show kindness to their enemies, to bear the cruellest wrongs without thought of retaliation, without any sign of resentment, calm under brutal treatment, ready at any moment to be torn from the bosom of their family, to be tortured, to be killed, "for his name's sake."

It was this fact which so profoundly impressed Napoleon. I would gladly quote his very words to Bertrand at St. Helena, but have not space. They are to this effect—that he himself knew human nature well and could inspire multitudes with such an enthusiasm for himself, that they would gladly die for him; but that his presence, his living voice and look, were necessary to kindle their devotion to him; while Christ, alone of all that ever lived, had succeeded in so raising the minds of men to the unseen, and winning their love, that, across the gulf of eighteen centuries, *he* could make a demand which a father might in vain make at the hands of his children, or a bride of her spouse. He asks for the human heart entirely and unconditionally, and forthwith his demand is granted. Wonderful! In defiance of time and space, the soul of man, with all its powers and faculties, becomes an annexation to the Empire of Christ. Time, the great destroyer, is powerless to extinguish the sacred flame. Time can neither exhaust its strength, nor put a limit to its range, &c., &c.

Now account for the effect produced on these people in Corinth, in Thessalonica, in Ephesus, in Colossæ, in

Rome, &c. Such was the effect produced by Paul's missionary intelligence on the Galatians, that they were ready in their exuberant gratitude to pull out their own eyes and give them to him ! What in the world could these servants of Christ have told them ? and told them, too, with such demonstrations of the truthfulness of their statements, that they implicitly believed what, forthwith, made such demands on themselves for utter self-sacrifice, so that they, not reluctantly, as men convinced against their will, but, though it might involve martyrdom, gladly, embraced the Saviourship and Lordship of the previously unheard-of Jesus the Christ ?

I am told that, whether it be true or not that Christ literally rose from the dead, yet *if they believed* that he did, their firm persuasion would work equally well, whether what they believed were fact or illusion ; that the latter, indeed, would produce all the same effects as the former ; so that we are barred from concluding anything as to the truth of the declaration from the results that flowed from it. I am assured that Christendom, believing what it has believed, would be what it has been, even if it were based on illusion instead of fact. It is the belief that has done it all. And, of course, it is true that a thing believed will affect the mind according to its own nature, and that the degree of intensity of effect will be according to the intensity of the belief. But that the belief that has changed the world, that (I appeal to the competent historian) has saved the world, which was literally perishing in its own corruption, that this belief of eighteen centuries was all of it utterly without any basis in fact, that it was all the effect of illusion, of hallucination, of the mistakes of a

few men and women who could not distinguish between fancies and facts, this I find it much harder to believe than to believe simply that Jesus did rise from the dead to be the Lord of all, as they declared.

But "the canons" of the nineteenth century history, and "the laws of science," and "the principles of the higher criticism," we are told, forbid our yielding credence any longer to the illusions very naturally yielded to by the apostles, who were simple men, not competent to distinguish subjective impressions from external phenomena. We are distinctly warned that the believer in the Resurrection of Christ, in contrast with a man properly imbued with the "canons" aforesaid, is like a poor chess-player sitting down to play with a skilled one. Piece after piece is lost, and the final check cannot be avoided. And it is explained to us that it *must* be so, for that criticism has the making of the rules, and has so made them that the game is in her own hands. This announcement leads us to look into the rules, then, before venturing on the encounter. We are told that such an alleged event as the Resurrection is inadmissible because *unhistorical*. We ask, in some wonder, How unhistorical, since History herself dates her annals "B.C." or "A.C."? And the answer, as if studiously prepared for the purpose, is—"That an event cannot be at once historical and supernatural, for history is only possible on the presupposition of the absolute continuity and homogeneity of experience; nothing enters the realm of history [as *constituted by me*, criticism], save through the gates of nature." Or, to borrow the words of another writer, though not dealing with our present subject: "Human history, say the philosophers, is the evolution of events which lie already in

their causes, as the properties of geometrical figures lie in the scientific definition of those figures. The qualities which Euclid proves to belong to the circle exist in the circle eternally."

So, then, *if* there be a God at all, such as devout Theists have believed in ; and *if* we are his offspring, as we have pleasantly thought ; and *if*, accordingly, his principal object with us is our training, so that we may know Him, and grow in that knowledge, and become like Him ; and *if*, in pursuit of this end (surely worthy of a God), He should not limit himself to what we can learn from "Nature," but should be pleased in some way to enter into more direct communication with prepared men who should be thus able to help the many, *if, i.e.*, He should see fit to reveal himself otherwise than by the earth and sea and sky, and the seasons, and the daily experiences of all men—then, History [I duly honour this abstraction, you see, by the capital H] cannot, forsooth, take any cognisance of the same, but is bound to ignore everything of the kind ; and that by virtue of the "canon" she has herself laid down ! Then, by this hypothesis, History may be self-doomed to refuse a fact, a truth, which, entering into the real history of the world, would become one of its mightiest factors ! So then it comes to this ; History, as history, writes herself atheistic ! She intends to pursue her way in sublime regardlessness of God ; for, by her own canon, she and any God such as poor mortals need, and such as can alone be an object of worship, cannot co-exist. It seems to me that History must revise her canons—at least, so far as to admit of exceptions that prove the rule.

But as there were brave men before Agamemnon, so surely we have had history and historians before to-day,

and surely *all* historians do not consider themselves bound by arbitrary pre-suppositions to brand as visionaries, as being only under the influence of strong illusions, the men to whom the world owes, literally, its salvation. Not to be able to distinguish between fancy and fact, and so to pass our whole life in acting on illusions, would not this be held to justify a physician in signing the certificate which would consign any man to an asylum?

Again, I am told that the apostles could only know the impression on their own minds of which they were conscious, and could not properly say that there was any outward phenomenon to correspond with that inward impression. Very good. Precisely what they tell us who affirm that if there be an external world we can have no proof of it, knowing for certain only our own sensations. So that this objection comes from a philosophy which we cannot here discuss in a sentence or two. The apostles, then, may have had as much and as good reason to believe that their impression that they saw and heard again their Lord was a true impression, as we have that our impression of an outward world is a true one. For, let it be granted that we know only our own sensations, yet we are so made as that we cannot but believe in an outward world. Our most fundamental belief of all necessarily is that our whole nature is not a lie. The fact is that the fallacy of the objection I am glancing at lies in the suppressed major.

But it is as I have said all along. The contention now is not really whether such an event as the Resurrection of Christ did actually take place; for we are honestly told that no evidence whatever could establish the truth of such a statement, since certain fore-

gone conclusions have been previously determined on. And thus the venue is removed into another Court altogether. We are told that all depends on the pre-suppositions we have come to about God, the soul, and the universe. And this witness is true. The man who believes in a God who is truly, in whatever way, the author of his being, and whom he may in a very real sense call his Father, whom he believes to care for him individually, and to whom he may unbosom himself and look for gracious help, and with whom he can actually come into communion, this man can, with the evidence given, readily believe in a risen Saviour, and exult in his belief, finding it a most helpful, and encouraging, and elevating, and Divine event. On the other hand, the man who, though retaining the name God, but meaning thereby nothing in common with the other, believes that for no purpose whatever has there ever been a single deviation from the order of nature as known to science, or from the ordinary experience of man; and that in no sense can the personal Christ be admitted to have been the image of the invisible God, who is altogether out of the circle wherein Science, History, and Criticism—the only Trinity possible for this enlightened age—are installed, to dominate all thought; I say, such a one is, of course, bound to find a flaw in every argument that the Christian believer can advance. So that while we believe, on what we deem sufficient evidence, he says no evidence whatever would suffice to warrant such a belief.

This being the case, then, we cease to waste time on the subordinate controversy about the particular event, and have to fall back on the previous question. But that is not our present point. We, having such a God as

will allow us to believe the Evangelical narrative on sufficient grounds, have only to ask ourselves whether, with our pre-suppositions being what they are, we have sufficient warrant for our faith that Christ is risen. And this point we have already somewhat pondered, and will only further touch presently on a few things that fortify our own convictions, without attempting to break a lance with opponents who warn us that on their own ground they have had the laying down of the rules of the combat, and that they have so framed them that we must fall, and they must triumph. Else, we might ask them to reconsider some of their canons. For certainly some devout believers in the Christ of the New Testament have been among the foremost of the sons of science. Need I name Sir William Herschell or Faraday? And men have sat for long years in the seat of the acknowledged critic—men who might well be credited with familiarity with the laws of criticism—and yet the *acidum criticum* did not corrode their faith in Christ. And we might ask if all men are to be refused the title of historian because, forsooth, they believe in a risen Christ? Or, if Science, History, and Criticism are inexorable, we might be permitted to ask, with all humility, Since when have these canons been framed? and are they unanimously submitted to by all men of culture? or, Does no appeal lie to any still higher tribunal? Are there no realms of thought and life where this triple authority has no more jurisdiction than a French Prefect has in England? Can Science, or Criticism, or History say aught about the soul, or even admit the word? Can they even admit God? or must God himself be tabooed? It is even so; and it is well that we are fairly warned as to the boundless

extent claimed to be dominated by the aforesaid canons ; which, however, may be subject to revision, or, at all events, have the bounds of their legitimate authority somewhat better defined, since it cannot be pretended that the whole of life and experience can be squeezed into the compass within which Science, History, and Criticism do lawfully reign and rule.

We return, then, to our former line.

Let the reader go through the Epistles of Paul, with, for the time, only this one object in view—viz., to see what is the place, and what the importance, in the Christian system, of the alleged resurrection of Christ from the dead. It is a good way to study the New Testament—to have some one object in reading any particular book, and for the time to neglect all other considerations. And if any one follows this advice, I have no doubt he will come to the conclusion that, if the apostles could have been convinced that they were under an illusion in fancying their Lord to be risen from the dead, and that he had spoken to them and given them their commission, they would have felt their occupation gone ; they would have had nothing to tell the world ; no glad tidings to preach, no bright hopes of immortality and a heaven of which Christ was the centre, wherewith to animate men's hearts. They would have had no ground on which to rest the fulcrum of the lever that should raise the world out of its depth of moral degradation and ruin ; nay, they would have had no lever itself to work with. Paul, in the Epistle which he wrote to his beloved son Timothy, shortly before his execution, says, Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised up from the dead according to my gospel (2 Tim. ii. 8).

But Paul and all the rest of them, say the impugnors of the resurrection, were under an illusion. Well, then, may we not wish in the interests of truth, that these noble men, who sacrificed everything that human nature clings to, for the sake of an error which they unhappily mistook for a truth; I say, may we not reasonably and kindly wish that they could have been (to borrow a word from the French) *disillusioned*? Paul then would have remained Saul still. He should have gone back to Tarsus, and established himself a tent-maker, and, for peace' sake, kept in with the synagogue and with the Roman authorities as well as he could, and been content with the common lot. And Peter and John would have gone back to Capernaum, and kept up a branch concern in Jerusalem, supplying the city with fish, and made money, and borne the insolence of the Romans as best they could. And so no idle waste of zeal, and enthusiasm, and comfort, and life in wild missionary efforts; no self-denial and no martyrdoms; and there would have been no Christianity and no Christendom. For if Jesus had been condemned by both Jewish and Roman authorities, and had been crucified as a blasphemous and sedition-monger, and there an end of him, what would there have been to tell the world? Still, if it were nothing but an illusion, why, as I said, in the interests of truth, which need to be supreme with us, it is an infinite pity that the poor visionaries could not have been *disillusioned* in time.

I, for one, find myself so constituted that I cannot regret the zeal, and the labours, and the sufferings, and the martyrdoms which have ennobled our common humanity, and which helped to give our glorious Christianity to the world. Still, truth must stand first. I

cannot be glad of any falsehood, however serviceable. And it comes to this—that the assertion that Christ really rose from the dead and revealed himself as alleged, is either a truth or a falsehood. There is no *tertium quid*. We are shut up to one or other of these alternatives. And there is no good in softening and toning down that word falsehood. If the apostles affirmed that Christ rose from the dead, whereas he did not rise from the dead, they (however they themselves might be persuaded) were testifying to the thing which was not—to a lie—though not a conscious one. And we do not wish the sadder alternative to be at all slurred over or disguised.

I cannot but think that most men, who at all care to retain the Christian name, will say with me, that, not listening exclusively to the faculties appealed to by science as *at present* understood, or criticism as just now expounded, or history as quite capriciously defined ; but letting their whole nature speak ;—they find *that* within them far deeper and more authoritative than the faculties thus one-sidedly appealed to, and that all that is deepest and most authoritative recognises the thorough believableness of the resurrection from the dead of such a one as Christ Jesus our Lord.

NO. XIV.

*HOW DO WE "GET OUR CHRIST" ?*

(CONCLUDED).

WE have seen that the Christian Church was called into existence by the belief (with all that it involved) that Jesus as the Christ was risen from the dead ; that, had not the apostles been assured in their own minds beyond all possibility of doubt that their Master was alive and Lord of all, they never would have entered on and maintained until the end the course they pursued ; that there would, therefore, have been no such thing as Christianity in the world, nor any Christendom. And we have found it hard to believe that their immovable convictions were, after all, nothing better than illusions, which, as illusions, it would be quite allowable to wish the poor visionaries (who thus lived and died in a fool's paradise) could have been disabused of.

Hitherto, we have come to our conclusion without basing it at all on the very brief and fragmentary notices at the end of the different Gospels. Neither, in referring to the Epistles, have we assumed either their inspiration or infallibility. I have been perfectly satisfied to use them as I would use Cæsar's Commentaries if I were treating of the Romans in Gaul or Britain.

And the point we have in this way now come to is

this, viz., that—the unquestioned Epistles of the Apostle Paul and others, and the thence ascertainable belief of all the early Christian Churches (which belief is still held by all Christendom) being based upon the persuasion that Jesus of Nazareth was risen from the dead, and had “shown himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs”—any narratives of the life of Christ (such as the four gospels) would necessarily contain some account of his resurrection. Yet, even if the four gospels had not come down to us, or if they had never been written, the belief of the Christian Church on this subject would still have been precisely what it is. And the churches had the Epistles before even they got the written Gospels; which seem to be the permanent embodiment, in a written form, of the oral teaching of the first missionaries of Christ.

Put the thing thus for a few moments:—Given the books of the Old Testament (the latest of which everybody will agree was written at the very least a century or two before John the Baptist appeared), and given, also, the unquestioned epistles of the Apostle Paul; what must *he* have been to whom a long line of prophets, beforehand, pointed forward, and men still greater than the prophets, after him, pointed back?

There is no dispute that from the earliest times that the Hebrew annals go back to, the people were systematically encouraged to look forward to the coming of One who should throw into the shade all their greatest, all their kings, and all their prophets. Even Moses had given them ground for this expectation. Nay, their father Abraham had lived and died in such a faith; and prophet after prophet had taken up the theme, till the idea of one “who should come” may

truly be called the golden day-dream of every Hebrew everywhere. They even had a name for him already. They called him beforehand Messiah; for more than Aaron the priest, more than David the king, or Solomon, he would be emphatically "*the* anointed of the Lord." No other nation through all the centuries of its national history was constantly looking for the advent of One who should make an entirely new future; One in whom, ultimately, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Yet such (however we may account for them or interpret them) were the rapt utterances of the prophet-bards of Israel, that the expectation they had kindled was matter of notoriety in all the world; so that the world itself had come, in some measure, to share in the expectation too, and, about the time at which the evangelical narrative begins, were looking for some extraordinary birth. So that nothing would be too glorious to believe of *him* whose advent was thus illustriously heralded, and in many ways shadowed forth. Only, the Jews, for the most part, did not know true glory from false, and so let their vain imagination take its colouring from the poor pomp and pageantry of courts and kings, instead of from "the things unseen and eternal"—truth, righteousness, goodness, holiness, love. Instead of the Divine Order, they were foolishly enamoured of the great Roman organisation, and took that for their ideal.

However, such was the expectation that had been growing and deepening for centuries that, when one and another appeared who excited the general wonder, forthwith the question was put to him, "Art thou he that should come?" Thus when John the Baptist came, quite in the spirit and power of their

famous prophet Elijah, the Jewish authorities at Jerusalem deputed some of their number to visit him, and ask the significant question, Art thou the Messiah (in Greek, Christ) ? So, at a later day, when John himself was confounded and out of heart at his confinement in one of Herod's dungeons—Jesus apparently never taking any notice of the cruel wrong done to his herald, nor putting forth any power for his deliverance—and for a time was, not unnaturally, troubled with doubts whether this Jesus whom he had baptized could really be the Messiah after all, his question took the old form, Art thou he who should come, or have we still to look for another ?

Everybody will agree, first, that no other than Jesus of Nazareth has the least title to be considered as the Christ, and secondly, that his title is without a flaw. Well, then, remember that the question is not, whether some ordinary member of the human family was raised from the dead, after having been killed and laid in the grave ; but, whether the Christ was ? And then I say, that the history as a whole hangs well together. The claim is, that Christ is not a mere unit of the great human family, but that he is Christ the Only. He stands alone. He has no peer. He has no second even. None before or after is what he was. Something differences him from all his brethren. He is among them ; he is of them ; his heart is with them ; he is meek and lowly in his bearing ; not ashamed of the poorest, or even the most fallen men scorned by their compatriots ; and women whom the sanctimonious turn away from with loathing are drawn to him, and find a refuge and a new hope of recovered goodness beneath his eye ; children nestle in his arms ; yet, still,

all felt that there was something in him which, even when he was most absorbed in their interests, and though he never seemed to be consciously condescending to the poor and ignorant and sinful—something in him which made him one alone. Those who were not uncandid seemed to see more of heaven in him than of earth. Most palpably related to men, one could easily believe that he was still more closely related to God. Was he more human, or Divine? or does the perfect human absorb into itself the Divine, so as to be a new thing in the world, full of heavenliest promise for men? Ay, friends, it is claimed for our glorious Christ that he is here as the world's Redeemer, as the true Life and Light of men, from whom the human race shall take a new line of departure; in whom, ultimately, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. He is the One true and perfect Man; absolutely faultless; he is the image of the invisible God, and God is content that we should all learn what He is by learning what Christ is. He is the competent bearer of the ineffable NAME.

Take, then, the general idea of Christ as shadowed forth beforehand by the long line of prophets, and as then given to the world by his apostles, and say whether some such life as that portrayed in the Four Gospels is not the proper and needed complement? Yes, to my mind, the prophets first and the apostles afterwards imply and demand the evangelists between.

And if we come to the study of the evangelists thus, and with no (as I should say, false) prepossessions or prejudices derived from science (which has no voice in the matter), or from a mere provincial, or even parochial, instead of universal, philosophy, I, for one, think that

the narrative is self-consistent and believable enough. The birth, the life, the teaching, the works, the death, and the resurrection form an harmonious whole ; unique, indeed, but then it professes to be unique. Given a *bonâ-fide* Creator—One every way worthy to be a Creator, owning to the full the responsibilities of a Creator, and then "the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" is "the Gospel of the Glory of the Blessed God." Such a one as Christ must be risen—if, *i.e.*, God be God ; and Peter was right in his declaration, that it was not possible that *he* should be permanently holden by Death.

Take the resurrection of Christ as a thing by itself, indeed, and no end of difficulties bristle up. But take the part with the whole to which it vitally belongs, and put that whole to such a focal distance as that the eye can take it in as a whole, and then I think the force of the question will be convincingly felt, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?" the dead in question being no less than the Son of God who came to give life to the world.

But our friends who boggle at Christ's resurrection, giving, as I think, a disproportionate heed to objections of a merely scientific character, and limiting their range of vision more than is wise by isolating this one feature of the story of the Christ, tell us that they have no means of cross-examining the witnesses, and, further, that their testimony does not agree together.

Yes, it is gravely urged that we cannot put the apostles into the witness-box! And certainly this is most true. They cannot be *subpœnaed*. But I do not know what other writers of *memoires pour servir* can be

thus summoned to put in an appearance. Herodotus, Thucydides, Julius Cæsar, Tacitus, will they come when you call them, any more than Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? Or our modern historians—can any of us who would like cross-question even them, our own contemporaries? No; we have their works, and we must make the best use we can of them.

It is, however, a much more rational plea that their several accounts do not agree, and cannot be woven into a consistent narrative. And I suppose most of us have at times been more or less disturbed by this fact. I confess for myself that I have in days gone by tried my own 'prentice hand at a harmony of the several fragments, but, to be honest, never succeeded so well as I should like.

But you will have seen that I do not base my belief in the fact, first of all, on the evangelical narratives, but get it primarily from other sources and considerations; so that it would remain even if the evangelists could be discredited. I should, in that case, say, Christ is risen, but of the particulars we have, to our regret, no thoroughly satisfactory report. But I am not driven to this pass. I believe that the alleged discrepancies are a little exaggerated, here and there a little strained, though not intentionally—at least not by those whom I should care to discuss with. Then, I have the impression that (since we have but the merest fragments) it would not be difficult, by only a fair and reasonable exercise of, may I say, an historical imagination? (which surely will not be objected to, since one of our foremost men of science has vindicated the use of a scientific imagination) to weave them all into a very self-consistent whole. It seems to me that this has

been satisfactorily done before to-day, and that a jury would accept the putting as reasonable. I fancy, too, that a sober English judge would direct the attention of a jury to the circumstance, that, while the different witnesses (if I may call them so) were not precisely at one in regard to some of the details, they were, nevertheless, all of them, most clear and positive as to the great and main fact itself. And further, he would weightily remind them, that the case did not by any means rest on the perfect dovetailing together of the reports of what exactly took place on the day on which it was alleged the Lord rose from the dead. He would charge them to take the case as a whole, and that if they were persuaded by all the other considerations, then the difficulty of perfectly harmonising the details must not weigh unduly with them.

Such has been my observation of the ordinary course of things among men, that I never do expect two—much less three and four—different statements of the same occurrence, or conversation, to exactly tally to a word. My experience leads me to regard it as next to impossible that it should do so. And my reading of history and biography confirms my own observation and experience. Let me illustrate this by a couple of quotations. Charles Dickens, in his last visit to America, writing home, says:—"I dined with Charles Sumner last Sunday . . . and Mr. Secretary Stanton was the only other guest, besides his own secretary. . . . He and Sumner having been the first two public men at the dying President's [Abraham Lincoln], and having remained with him until he breathed his last, we fell into a very interesting conversation after dinner, when each of them

giving his own narrative separately, the usual discrepancies about details of time were observable." (Life, iii., p. 386.)

My next refers to "La Journée d'Aumale," as it came to be called. After this affair, in which Henry IV. of France was wounded, and was placed in extreme peril, he retired to Neufchatel, "where fever and excitement compelled his majesty to return to bed. 'We then,' writes Sully, 'gathered round the couch of the king, and conversed on the events of the day. I have, however, to observe as singular that of *all the persons* assembled in his majesty's chamber, *and present at the combat, not two individuals could agree in their recital.*'" (Freer's Hist. of Henry IV. ii., p. 24.)

I am sure that my limited reading would have enabled me (had I only made extracts at the time) to furnish hundreds upon hundreds of similar instances. And, as I have said, I do not think it possible for any occurrence or conversation to be reported by different persons in precisely exact agreement with each other. Who has not often smiled at the varying reports of some simple and unimportant matter by eye-and-ear witnesses of unimpeachable truthfulness? Nay, how rarely do any of us tell the same story twice in precisely the same terms. So that any person on the catch for proofs of our inconsistency may very easily detect us in inconsistency.

Not claiming, therefore, for our narrators any miraculous preservation from all possible divergence, the mere circumstance that there are, in their several accounts, what some men emphasize as discrepancies, does not in any degree so affect my mind as to bring the substantial fact that they report into anything like uncertainty.

And I think the reader will be willing for me to enrich this Letter by another quotation, one on the general subject of difficulties in religion ; and, this time, from one of the keenest logicians we have yet among us—John Henry Newman. He says, in his "Apologia": "I am far, of course, from denying that every article of the Christian creed, whether as held by Catholics or Protestants, is beset with intellectual difficulties ; and it is simple fact that, for myself, I cannot answer those difficulties. Many persons are very sensitive of the difficulties of religion ; I am as sensitive as any one ; but I *have never been able to see a connection between apprehending those difficulties*, however keenly, and multiplying them to any extent, *and doubting the doctrines to which they are attached*. Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt, as I understand the subject ; difficulty and doubt are incommensurate."

To conclude this part of our subject, then. Looking back on all that preceded the advent of our Lord, then pondering all that took place after his most certain crucifixion and death, in the firm planting of Christianity in the world at such a cost to the first witnesses, I find the resurrection of Christ from the dead to be an absolutely indispensable link in the chain, and could just as soon believe that we have no God as believe that we have no risen Saviour.

I am aware that to treat such a theme in a few necessarily very brief Letters must involve a certain amount of unsatisfactoriness. Volumes would be required rather, and volumes have been written, too, but I have done what I could under the circumstances to suggest matter for expanded thought to those of the perplexed on this subject who,

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perhaps, needed something brief and ready to hand. God help us all to seize and make our own the grandest truths, and then, under their holy and happy influence, we shall be capable of a wise and noble disregard of mere difficulties. Certainly, he who cannot, or will not, believe, till the very last fragment of a difficulty has been satisfactorily disposed of, will find himself, not rich in faith, but simply empty and void thereof, and full only of doubts, which is as if a hungry man should try to fill his belly with the East wind. Thank God, "the cross," which, as poor Shelley could see, "still leads the generations on," and which is the one symbol on the banner of all Christendom, means not only that Christ was crucified, but that Christ is risen ; without which, what sort of a banner would Christendom have ?

NO. XV.

*RETROSPECT AND RESUMPTION.*

WE must pause for a moment just to look about us, and see whereabouts we are, lest any of my readers should unfortunately lose the thread of connection.

The reader, then, will please to remember that we were engaged, some Letters back, in justifying to ourselves—*i.e.*, to our own understandings—that belief in God which is so satisfactory to the heart, and so witnessed to, generally, by the conscience. The *conscience*, by many indubitable tokens, readily falls under the sense of a superior and an authority in the unseen realm, who takes cognisance of our deeds, and even of our very thoughts and feelings. And the recognition is direct and immediate. The *heart*, too, imperatively cries out for the living God. If there were none above us whom we could not only intellectually regard as the great cause of all things, but credit with all possible perfection, knowing us as individuals and caring for us, not merely as a conscientious ruler cares for his subjects, but as a father cares for his children, and both able and willing to protect and guide and bless us ; I say, if there were no such Being, if this deep want of humanity were really left unprovided for—if religion, *i.e.*, had no basis

and no warrant, and, at its purest and loftiest and best, was but a delusion and a vanity and a superstition, so that Truth would demand the clean sweeping away of all temples, and all worship, and all faiths, leaving us face to face with nothing higher and no one better or Diviner than ourselves, so that the space hitherto filled by a God is at last an ascertained blank—then there would be no meaning or worth, much less preciousness, in anything, and existence would at younger than five-and-twenty be worthless as a sucked orange. It is this deep—and, as I fancy, inextinguishable—conviction that I think of when I speak of the heart crying out for the living God.

But we recognised that, sooner or later, there comes to most of us an hour when it is necessary to justify to the understanding the belief that the heart so instinctively adopts and clings to. We glanced, therefore, at some of the very numerous considerations by which thoughtful men (at least generally) are able to bring their whole being into happy acquiescence in the glorious and restful belief in the very God that there *needs* to be, the very God that there *ought* to be, one might say. And it was after suggesting some of these that I said that, to those who believe in Christ, *he* is the readiest and the best proof of God. This led to the question, How do we get our Christ? and this to the further one, Whether we can, on the whole, take the Christ of the New Testament as sufficiently authenticated? So the still further question forced itself on us, Whether or not Jesus the Christ was really alive from the dead, as all his apostles affirmed, and all Christians have hitherto believed? And having, as I trust, fairly faced this question in the light of present-

day sensitiveness for the permission of Science to believe whatever we do believe, I hope we may now say that *we have such a Christ* as was foretold for ages before he appeared, and was believed in by apostles, and is truly set forth for us in the pages of the New Testament. And still let it be observed that, as yet, I say no word about the inspiration or infallibility of the writers, but am content to take their writings as we have them, and let them verify or justify themselves. It is Christ as the grand proof of God that we are engaged with ; but, by how much he is a proof, by so much also is he—what we want as profoundly—a revelation of the God whose being he establishes. So that we have to study him whom Christendom delights to call Master and Lord. As certain Greeks said to Philip, Sir, we would see Jesus ; so we say, We want to know him for whom it is claimed that the Invisible God is well pleased that we should take him as his image.

We have recognised that the Epistles were in the hands of the Churches before the documents that we now call the Gospels were ; and that these latter were attempts to fix in writing (happily for the world) the oral teaching about Christ of the first missionaries. Accordingly, we should expect to find in the Epistles clear intimations about him, in, perhaps, the doctrinal form (or in relation to their doctrinal significance) of the same kind as the Gospels would contain in the historical or biographical form. And it is so. The Gospels are an illustration and expansion of the things concerning Christ which were most surely believed by the disciples from the beginning of the Church ; and if it were desirable to crowd the page, it would be easy

to show, by scores of quotations from the Epistles, that the statements of the Evangelists are, all of them, previously posited as the sure foundation-stones (so to speak) on which the apostles who taught the doctrinal significance of the historical (or biographical) facts, built—surely not the wood, hay, and stubble that the fire will destroy—but the gold and silver and precious stones which will endure unto the end.

Taking, then, the Epistles first, and the Gospels as illustrating them, we find, within, say, five-and-twenty years after Christ was crucified, certain impressions concerning him burnt (if one may say so) ineffaceably into the deepest consciousness of the first generation of Christians. Men who had known him personally, as well as those who came to know him primarily through them, exulted to think of him as their true and rightful Lord, as even Lord of all. They associated his name with the Father's in a way which it is not possible any Jew would have done, but on the most unequivocal and compulsory grounds. It is hard for us to realise the intensity with which Hebrews were horrified at whatever was (to them) constructive blasphemy. We need not regard the High Priest and his brethren as altogether and consciously acting a part, or affecting what in truth they did not at all feel, when they rent their clothes at the quiet assurance by Christ, which they understood (and were by him allowed to understand) as involving a divine relationship which it was blasphemous for the creature to assume. Jews, jealous, be it remembered, for the unity of God, as none beside them ever were before or since, believed Christ to be incomparably more and other than their famous Moses could possibly have been made. Enlarge (on the moral and intellectual

plane), and, with gifts and graces aggrandise and perfect their Moses as you will (in thought), and even then he would never have been "Son of God," as Christ was Son of God in the eyes of such good Jews as Paul, John, Peter, and the rest. Christ had made such an impression on them that they affirmed him, alone of all men, to be not only sinless, but faultless. They could believe that he came into this world, through the common portals of humanity indeed, but after a perfectly unique fashion, and so as that a stigma (more hateful to the Jews than to any other people) must rest on the memory of Mary, if the strange story which was told among them were not true. They could believe of him that his birth was announced by a choir of angels; that (however they reconciled in their own minds—for they must have perceived the apparent incongruity as clearly as we do—the two beliefs—viz., of his birth at Bethlehem, and his pre-existence) he came down from heaven; that he had by inheritance a name above that of the highest angels; and that, after he had accomplished the work for the sake of which he came hither, he ascended up where he was before, far above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named, in whatever worlds. They could believe that he was the appointed judge of all men, and head over all things. Any biographical statements that went to illustrate a perfect character were to them exquisitely natural. In a word, the impression he made upon them was such that they easily believed that, if it were possible for God to stamp a true, full, complete, symmetrical image of himself in flesh, to reveal himself satisfactorily in a human life, this was what was done in the person of Christ Jesus their Lord.

I am not now affirming (what I, nevertheless, do most assuredly believe) that the statements of apostles and evangelists are true, but only appealing to common sense with the question, *What must he have been who left such an impression concerning himself on the minds*—not of pagans, who easily believed in several divinities, but—of religiously sensitive Jews, and Jews of such high-toned moral excellence and spiritual insight as Peter and James and John and Paul became? and these men are only the foremost of a host.

If I could, within the space I have allotted myself, adequately develop the manifold lines of thought that, from all points of the circle, converge to one central point, I should then, with fullest satisfaction and confidence, ask you to conclude with me that, on the whole, and speaking generally, the New Testament hangs fairly well together, and that the Christ of the apostles and evangelists is the very Christ of God.

Thus, then, I have tried to show (as well as, in the few pages I can give to this point, I could show) "how we get our Christ"; and as this was attempted for the sake of its relation to the great idea of GOD, it is to its value in this respect that we now return.

And yet one word more. I want you to mark one fair consequence deducible from that uniqueness, merely, of Christ, which men not his disciples acknowledge themselves forced to admit. Thus the late John Stuart Mill says, "Whatever else may be taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left; a unique figure, not more unlike all his precursors than all his followers, even those who had the direct benefit of his personal teaching. It is of no use to say that Christ, as exhibited in the Gospels, is not

historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable has been superadded by the tradition of his followers. . . . But who among his disciples or among their proselytes was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee; as certainly not St. Paul, whose character and idiosyncrasies were of a totally different sort; still less the early Christian writers," &c., &c. ("Three Essays on Religion," p. 253.)

Now, if there ever stood on earth a man who was absolutely unequalled in moral excellence, so that his soul was like a star which shone apart; one whose holy presence made others feel their sinfulness as nothing else ever did; one whom it is not difficult to show to have been literally without a fault, without one moral stain, even the least; in whom the spiritual in man blossomed and bore the ripest fruits;—then, I say, that, taking the very lowest ground, such a one must, in the very nature of things, have had an insight into spiritual truth, into all things good and holy, which none other ever had. If there be anything divine anywhere, such a one as he, by the very force of affinity, would discern it, would descend below the surface, and revel in the depths thereof. If any man that ever lived would be entitled to speak confidently, with the authority of conscious truth, about God, Christ would be he. The profoundest philosophers, the acutest logicians, the most penetrating of scientific intellects, must in common modesty, hush before *him* when he speaks of God. For what neither the keenest intellect nor the most patient science can detect, the spirit of the spiritual may clearly discern.

Every man in his own order. In the schools let the philosopher speak, and let students ponder (but there are many sects in philosophy as in religion, and it is not yet unanimously established which is like Aaron's rod, ultimately to swallow up all the rest) ; in the lecture-room and laboratory let those sons of science whom we love to honour, make to us their astounding revelations, and be listened to almost as to oracles. We thank God for German metaphysicians (at least, some do, perhaps), and possibly still more of us for our Scotch and English philosophers, for Hamilton and Mill, and, equal to any of them, and competent to survey, to revise, and to correct them all (I think), Dr. James Martineau ; and we are grateful to Herschel and Faraday and Huxley and Tyndall and others, acknowledging them as authorities within their own proper sphere. In matters of ethnology and philology who does not acknowledge Max Müller and men like him as benefactors ? As to poetry, we listen with all our ears to Wordsworth, Coleridge, and many more. And then, to continue the same line, in matters of religion, in things spiritual, in questions pertaining to the divine, to God, does not Christ tower far more grandly above all others, than the men I have named rise above their disciples ? Why, in matters of science, of taste, and so on, we respectfully and gratefully defer to this and that and the other man, who are masters of those branches of knowledge they have made their own. Shall we not, then, on these higher themes, defer with a vastly deeper reverence and more grateful love to such a one as Christ, who calmly says that not only the Father alone knows him fully, but that he alone fully knows the Father ? Surely my implicit deference, in

the things of God, to Christ, is better justified than my deference as to the working of human passions to Shakespeare, or in questions about art to Mr. Ruskin! Christ being what even non-disciples confess him to have been, it is the highest wisdom, the truest exercise of reason, for me to sit at his feet and learn of him whatever he may teach about God. Such a one cannot but be a light to lighten the nations, and I say blessed is the man who believes his own word, "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." And this word of his verifies itself in the experience (as I believe) of all who simply and in good faith have tested it.

Then, receiving Christ thus, we find we have the God we wanted, and that word of the apostle is true, He that hath the Son hath the Father also. For the God of our Lord Jesus Christ is the very God the poor human heart craves for, when once it ceases from its sad tamperings and experiments with sin, and wants to be right, to be at unity with itself, and with the universe, as a happy and contented fraction of the whole. He finds it life eternal to know God by means of Jesus Christ. For it was no Great First Cause that Christ came to tell of; not merely the Moral Governor of the Universe (though such He necessarily is); but Christ's one name for God was evermore—THE FATHER.

Men discuss and dispute about "the Personality of God," and find the personal and "the Absolute" mutually destructive. I think that not only are some of our parochial philosophies rather too unphilosophically dogmatic, but that there is a good deal of bewil-

dering logomachy indulged in. Our best and happiest words concerning God must be recognised as necessarily poor and inadequate. Often I find myself obliged to say, Never mind the terms or the words, is *the thing meant* true? For understand—the creature's *thoughts* even cannot fully comprehend and embrace the truth about God, and our *words* fall far short of our thoughts. We cannot say in words all we think, and feel, diffusedly imagine, and yield the spirit up to. I will not quarrel with any one over the mere *word* "personal." What I want to know is whether the Being, or Power, or Force, or Mind, that we are compelled ultimately to assume, is One who knows me, and cares for me, as I know and care for my child? And to whom shall I turn for help? Whither can I betake myself? I repeat the old, old question, Who can by searching find out God? and I groan in the brokenness of my heart with the patriarch, Oh, that I knew where I might find Him! But the Christ whom we have found confronts me on my dreary path, and assures me of the Father. Why, (if I may speak so) did not Christ want God, even more profoundly than I do? And what ineffable peace I am sure he had down deep in his deepest soul. *He* never went in weary search. *He* was never weighted with the unendurable burden of suspense as to God. *He*—shall I say?—evidently sat at his feet. No, rather lay in his bosom. Whatever he knew, or did not know, he indisputably knew the Father, lived in the love of the Father; and if Christ could be deceived or mistaken in this, there is no truth anywhere.

Yes, Christ is the readiest and easiest way to the knowledge of God. See; if there be a God, and if we are his creatures, He had need be as knowable and as

reachable to the poor and to the young, even to children, as to the intellectual and philosophic. With Him these momentary distinctions among his children surely do not exist. And the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the very God and Father for every one of us. We may see the glory of God in the face of Christ. He is the Declarer and Revealer of the Father, and so of Eternal Life. In him the true life—and that is the Eternal life—was manifested, and we listen reverently and gladly to the testimony of his disciple John, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon, and our hands handled, of [concerning] the Word of life ; and the Life was manifested, and we have seen, and bare witness, and declare unto you the Life Everlasting, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."

This has been the faith of nearly nineteen centuries ; and though now everything is being sifted and criticised, not only thoroughly (which is good), but remorselessly, and often with an animus which betrays that even the idea of such a one as Christ and the God and Father whom he revealed is unwelcome to the secret heart, yet, from a thousand considerations, we may be sure that the faith which has stood the manifold assaults of all these centuries, will still survive the opponents of the nineteenth century as it did the virulent enemies it had to encounter at the first.

Quite possibly, then, the perplexed would do well to stop out from their hearts for a time the objections against New Testament Christianity of those who have nothing better to substitute for it, and give themselves up thoroughly and lovingly to the Christ who promises

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what none other ever promised, and who, according to the testimony of multitudes who have taken him at his word, is as faithful to that word to-day as John and Paul and a host of others found him at the beginning. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. I am the Light of the World, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Test him, my friends, by thorough discipleship, and see.

NO. XVI.

*ABOUT THE BIBLE.*

EVERY reader is fully, and perhaps painfully, aware that the Scriptures to-day do not stand exactly where they did some years ago. They have heard of able men, scholars and University Professors, being dragged before Presbyteries and Synods, &c., for promulgating a freedom of opinion on this subject which piety has taken alarm at. And they will naturally expect that Letters with the particular title that these bear should sooner or later deal with a matter that is no doubt just now creating a good deal of perplexity to not a few. Quite possibly, indeed, some of my readers have thought that I should have begun this course of Letters with the Bible, and, having first of all shown it to be an inspired and infallible book, then proceeded to bring out of it the particular truths necessary for the particular class I had undertaken to address. But, you see, I have done nothing of the sort. I have not refrained, indeed, from freely quoting the Scriptures whenever I have wanted to quote them ; but, in doing so, I think I have for the most part shown that they justify themselves (so far, *i.e.*, as I have used them), and I have not hitherto thought it at all necessary to back them up and support them by any fondly-invented theories whatever

about their being miraculously dictated, and so forth. All in good time, however.

When David went forth against the Goliath of his day, he felt Saul's armour to be nothing but an incumbrance, and preferred to meet the foe clad in his simple shepherd vest, and with only the common, familiar, everyday sling in his hand. And though the helmeted warriors gravely shook their heads, yet the stripling was right. He felt sure in himself that he could do better without the sort of thing that Saul and his chieftains deemed so essential than with it.

The thought that I venture to suppose this illustration will suggest is worthy of serious consideration. It is astonishing how much harm has often accrued from unwise defences, and even from merely premature ones. Their erection has, not unfrequently, been the result of a want of thorough and perfect trust in the real goodness of the cause. I have heard men say, for instance, that if religion be not supported by the civil power, by legislative enactments in its favour, and by a good dip into the nation's purse, it will go to the dogs! Very well, I reply, to the dogs then let it go. Such a religion cannot be divine, does not know how to lay hold of the hearts of men, and kindle for itself an undying enthusiasm by the blessings it confers. Let it go, and let us give the Heavens no peace till they send us a better—one that can prove itself divine by every token. Robert Hall's predecessor at Cambridge said a word that occurs to me here, and I will enrich my Letter by quoting it:—"When some atheists appeared in the Jewish Church, and attacked the knowledge and worship of God, the people were intimidated, but the royal Psalmist observes (liiii. 5), 'They were in great fear, where no fear was.'

Similar events have produced similar fears in the Christian Church, and to these honest but ignorant fears we ascribe the much greater part of those pious frauds with which Christians have disgraced the cause of God. Most of 'the Fathers,' most of the Church of Rome, and some Protestant Churches, have treated Christianity like an old crazy palace which requires props or supporters on every side; and they have manifested great injudiciousness in the choice of supporters. The Gospel stands like a stately, sturdy oak, defying the attacks of every storm; but they who had pitched their tents beneath its shade heard a rustling among the leaves—trembled for the fate of the tree—and, to secure it, surrounded it with a plantation of osiers!"—*R. Robinson's Preface to Vol. II. of Saurin's Sermons.*

So Luther, at one of the crises of the Reformation [by the bye, when is there not—perhaps, happily for us, if we did but know it—a crisis of some kind or other?] tells us that he learned a lesson by looking up one night to the starry heavens. Lo! all those countless orbs, hanging in space; and what supported them? Nothing, that was apparent—nothing, that any one could see. Yet they fell not. Then he saw that it was the ever-present God that alone sustained the heavens, and that the same God supported his Church, and he took courage.

But what has all this to do with our present subject? Much, my friends. What Saul's armour was to David—what the secular establishment of Articles and Creeds and Ecclesiastical systems is to spiritual religion, the religion of the heart and conscience and life—and what pious frauds of all kinds have been to the cause they were so mistakenly intended to support,—that, I think,

our numerous and conflicting theories of the Inspiration and Infallibility of the Bible have often been to the truths of Scripture, especially when prematurely presented. If we must have our neat and compact theories *about* the Bible, surely they must come by-and-by; their place is in the rear, not in the front. First, give us the Book, and let the Book speak for itself, and, if it seem good, give us its own rationale; good wine, they say, needs no bush. And it is so. I, for one, like to cover no more ground than I can maintain, and I honestly confess I would not undertake to meet in discussion an accomplished sceptic, with any of the orthodox theories on the subject hanging about my neck. I won't wear armour that I know has open places through which I may be pierced. There is, indeed, "the whole armour of God;" but that, as it was not fabricated at Rome, so neither was it at Geneva, or Lambeth; no, nor yet in Scotland.

I mentioned theories of inspiration. I once, in some anxiety, turned, many years since, to a very able treatise on the subject, but the writer began by reducing the number of really good theories to eleven, or thirteen! I forget which. It reminded me that when I was young in such studies, a clergyman with whom I had been intimate in his college days, told me he had in his desk a list of thirty-two kinds of faith, which he kindly offered to lend me. Fortunately for me, I was led to decline, with thanks, the chance of picking out from thirty-two kinds the one that would suit me. And to surround the Bible with *chevaux de frise*, meant for its defence, while the bristling front only provokes attack, has often seemed to me questionable policy. Certainly the efficacy of food does not depend on the eater's

previous knowledge of the process by which it was prepared, or the exact proportions of its several ingredients. I somehow cannot help fancying that God's method, after all, is best. And really it is not bad, if we could but bring ourselves to think so, and to watch how He goes to work, and how The Son worked as he saw the Father did. God has, in what ways seemed good in his sight, given us the book without a preface.

Well, having read the above, you may forget it all if you choose, and we will, if you please, make a new beginning here.

There are a good many books in the world, are there not? Some of them such as, we are quite sure, the world will never let die. What will preserve them? What will secure them against either oblivion or neglect? Just their own power to keep their place. Nothing else. Certainly not any claims made on their behalf, independently of their own intrinsic merit. Men admire them, prize them, value them, love them too much ever to let them perish. And the modest, friendly way in which they come among us enhances their charms. They come as the beauties of Nature come, and all the priceless blessings of life. Not like a summons in the hands of a policeman, or a demand to surrender delivered by a herald, with trumpet, at the gate of a fortified city held against the invader. They come to us as true love comes to us. Have you ever noticed how tenderly the lover of certain books speaks of them, or how enthusiastically? Well, they have come into the world with nothing but their merits to recommend them; not forced on men with threats of pains and penalties, like the Athanasian Creed. Of course, Homer is one of the first that occurs to me.

Did it ever fall to your lot to hear some enthusiastic scholar quote him? rattling off one favourite passage after another, till he seemed to have caught something of the poetic fire, the "fine frenzy," himself. Now how much of the hold that Homer has on the very hearts of some men depends on their theories about the bard, or the way in which the thousands of his verses were strung together? With a right theory or a wrong theory, a true theory or a false one, or no theory whatever, Homer is Homer, and ever will be to the scholar's heart, and nothing can ever add to or take away from the intrinsic qualities of the poet or poem.

Neither do men need any theory about Plato in order to find his worth. Take only the *Apology* of Socrates before his judges, and the discourse on Immortality he held with his friends in his prison, just previously to drinking the hemlock—in both of which we find things that we fancy Saul of Tarsus (our own "beloved brother Paul") must have read at some time—and who cares to theorise about the how and the whence he got his thoughts? There they are. Or to leave all the ancients, what is any theory about Dante, or Shakespeare, or Milton, compared with their works themselves? Some folks have amused themselves with most determined scepticism as to whether, after all, Shakespeare really did write the plays that bear his name. Well, I have no time to waste on the notion that Bacon wrote them. Shakespeare, or no Shakespeare, I have *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*, and *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*, and the others. There they are; and they are worth what they are worth, quite independently of all our knowledge, or all our ignorance, of the authorship, or of the mode or date of composition.

Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" has somehow been felt to be a very wonderful book. It has, I suppose, at some stage of their religious history, helped many thousands; yet it neither has, nor needs, any elaborate theory to help to keep its place. If men should everywhere clean outgrow the possibility of being helped by it, or if it should be crowded out by greatly better books, be it so; honest John would be the last to wish it otherwise. And so, how do our modern poets maintain their places; Dryden, Pope, Cowper, Wordsworth, Burns, Shelley, Tennyson, Browning, and others? Do we not enjoy them and give them a warm place in our hearts, each man according to his own taste, without ever troubling ourselves one jot about any theory of the poetic inspiration, of whatever kind, under which they have poured out for us their treasures more precious than rubies? Do the "Idyls of the King," or does "In Memoriam," owe anything to the Poet-laureateship of the author?

I hope my readers know what John Milton says about books in his famous *Areopagitica*. With what a noble enthusiasm does he write concerning them! how they are "not absolutely dead things, but do contain a progeny of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. . . . And . . . as good almost kill a man as kill a good book; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. . . . A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond

life, &c." Thus our Milton of books in general, thinking chiefly of the noble works wherewith he had so greatly nourished his own life, and not here referring at all to what he himself would have earnestly revered as *The Book of books*, and to be beyond his praise.

And the meaning of the line of remark I have therefore taken is, I trust, obvious. We derogate, I think, from the honour due to the Bible if we are afraid to trust it among men on the simple ground of its own intrinsic merits. The manufacturer, who knows that in the open market of the world his goods can beat the productions of all other countries, does not want any protective duties. And just so, the best friends of the Bible are not Bible-protectionists. Fear for the Bible, unless I fence it round, and guard it by post-canonical theories about inspiration and infallibility! Not I. Good bread or good wine will sufficiently commend itself. So will good land, and gold, and diamonds. So will a good history, or a lovely poem. Won't all that is best in the Bible? Just take, now, the Twenty-third Psalm, and tell me what theory you want, in order to make it precious to the full? Why, how safely one might offer a prize of a thousand guineas to any one who should produce such another lyric, of only six verses, and without a phrase or a thought in it borrowed from any other source! Make it certain that an angel from God brought it down from heaven, written in beautifullest Hebrew, is it one whit better or more precious than it was before? "May I sing it for myself, as out of my own heart?" Yes, if I want to; and if I don't, what will any theory of its origin help me? "How do I know that I may use it?" How do I

know I may use the atmosphere and the sunshine, and enjoy the loveliness of flowers, and the solemn beauty of the star-sown spaces? Here are the atmosphere, and the sunshine, and the flowers, and the stars, free to everybody to use and enjoy as much as they can. So with all poetry, and all perennial philosophy everywhere; and so with all I find that in any way helps my conscience, or understanding, or heart, in the Book of books. Nothing can make the book the same thing to a child, to a schoolboy, to a young man or woman, a peasant, a scholar, a wise man, a fool, a man who wants to be good, and one who loves and does what he ought not.

Who that loves the Bible does not feel that all theories about it are unspeakably poor, *beside the Book* itself? I, for one, should not be at all regretful if for a period of, say twenty years, it might be simply left to make its own way and speak for itself, being allowed, for a time, to come forth among men in its own right, to take its own place, and do its own work, without being heralded by men-at-arms and trumpeters proclaiming it (half defiantly) to be such as that all men are thereby imperatively summoned to receive it as they would receive the great God himself. Not that I would undervalue wise and thoughtful and comprehensive hypotheses on the subject. Nay, it is even impossible that men who love the Bible should abstain from earnest and anxious endeavours to frame a theory about the Book; but, then, what they really want is a theory which shall take in—not only some, but all the facts. I say *all*. But who that knows how much is covered by that little monosyllable will undertake to give in a sentence, however long, such a definition of inspiration

or infallibility as will apply equally to all the Proverbs of Solomon, the Books of Chronicles, the Prophecies of Isaiah, and the Words of Christ ?

When I was young "Plenary Inspiration" and "Verbal Inspiration" were watchwords, and tests, by adhesion or non-adhesion to which men's "soundness," and even their piety, was judged and decided. It is now simply amazing, something at which we lift up the hands of astonishment, that good and (otherwise) intelligent men could have ever staked so much that was vitally precious on so rash an assumption. Give us a theory, we say, that will not be putting us into one dilemma after another, page after page, as we read. For instance, I read (Prov. xvi. 7) "When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Now, how can I avoid asking myself whether that is true? Is it a fact that when a good man is most heedful of all his Lord's will, all enmity against him is made to cease? Why, "Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute and slay?" asked Stephen. Were Christ's enemies at peace with *him*? or Stephen's? or Paul's? What irony in the question! If all the sufferers for religion's sake, for Christ's sake, had believed that this word of Solomon's was "inspired" and "infallibly true," what must they have concluded but that, since their enemies were not propitiated, their ways did not please the Lord? Alas for them! lying in filthy dungeons, or going to the stake, with this word stabbing at their hearts! If we *must* have a theory, then do we not imperatively need one that shall leave us perfectly unfettered and free to ask (respecting such a sentence, for instance, as that I have quoted from the Proverbs), Is this true, or is it

not? and that without any lurking fear lest we should be too bold.

I know too well that some theories about the Bible have been nothing but a stumbling-block and a hindrance, and that is why I am encouraging those who have been perplexed thereby to distinguish between *the Book* and (any, or all) theories *about* the Book. It will save them, possibly, much needless distress, and leave the Scriptures on precisely the ground that the Providence of God has placed them on. I hope to be able, in one or two following Letters, to show my friends what I find for myself to be a rock on which, if the feet are planted, we may remain unmoved amid the storms that are filling too many hearts with fear and dismay. And I for one feel sure that the freer and nobler views of the various writings which (being for convenience bound up together in one book) constitute the Scriptures, not merely must and will supersede the more mechanical, but will commend themselves as much by the blessedness of the effect as by the force of the evidence. The Bible, as has been well said, is a library rather than a book. There are sixty-six separate books that go to compose it, and it ought to be obvious that no one word can be applicable to so composite a production.

Since this Letter was written, I have stumbled on a page from the private diary of the late Dr. Norman Macleod, which will show what the Bible, taken simply by itself, can be to a large and free-hearted disciple. It was written towards quite the end of his devoted life. "It is an awful thought," he writes, "that some men cannot bring God's own revealed truth into the light of reason and conscience. I have such profound faith in

revealed truth *to* us as to rejoice that it shall be tried by what God has revealed *in* us. I would tremble for any truth that could be maintained by nothing more than by the authority of the letter, by an 'it is written.' Jesus used this argument indeed; but it was to the Devil, who had no spiritual eye to see. So we may address his disciples, and leave them to think of it. Yes, and it answers to what is written in the soul, conscience, hopes, sorrows, joys, and expectations of humanity. I almost adore the Bible. The more I read it, without almost any thought of questions of inspiration, but simply as a record of fact, of precept and principle, of judgment and mercy, of God's acts and 'ways' (*i.e.*, the principles of his acts), all culminating in Christ, as a revelation of what God is to man, and what man was created to be to God, the more my whole moral being responds to it as being a revelation of God. The authority of the Bible is to me supreme because it 'commands' my reason and conscience. I feel it is from God. It was once otherwise with me. It is so no more; and the older I get, the more my spirit says Amen to it." (Life; Vol. II., p. 315.)

## NO. XVII.

### *ABOUT THE BIBLE*

(CONTINUED).

THE Bible, we say, comes to man, or is given to man. If there were no men to receive and read it, of course the Bible would not have been. Here, then, there are two factors, so to speak, and both of them necessary to be understood. For how shall we put ourselves into the right attitude towards the book unless we know something of ourselves, whom the book addresses? Do we ask which knowledge stands first, then, in order of time? The answer is, Man was before the Bible. In point of time, man is first, and the book second. And, as a matter of fact, man was upon the earth for long, long ages—no one knows how long—before any part of the book was written. Nay, the *whole* book has not been in existence more than eighteen centuries (many would say seventeen). For the *New Testament* certainly was not completed earlier. And if we refer to the *Old Testament*, that was not completed till some two or three centuries before Christ. Till then the materials for it had been gradually accumulating during several centuries. But where? Among what people? In the open of the great world? No, in little Judea, a happily secluded district in Asia, not much bigger than two large English counties.

A thousand years before Christ, however, Hebrew lyrists began to extol in glorious psalms that now will never die, "the word—or law—of the Lord." But they hardly meant thereby *a book*, because, at the most, there was not much more than the Pentateuch written, at all events. Generally, they meant a much more living thing, so to speak, when they praised the word, or the law, of the Lord as being like the sun, or more precious than gold and silver or necessary food. Some couple of centuries before Christ the Hebrew Scriptures got translated into Greek, so that Greek-speaking people could become acquainted with the religious books of the Jews, if they were so minded, and had indeed heard of them, and could afford to purchase costly manuscripts. Since the art of printing was invented, however, four hundred years ago, private persons, and even poor people, have happily been able to obtain copies of this marvellous book. And now, in, I think, nearly two hundred different languages or dialects, men, almost all the world over, can read in their own tongue (by means of translations more or less good) the historical records of how God treated the progenitors of the Hebrew people and themselves, and the hymns of their unequalled bards, and the prophecies of their gifted seers, and other wonderful—very wonderful—literary, or, rather, religious productions; all preparing the way for such a phenomenon as the world never saw but once—the advent of Christ; which again gave rise to various accounts of his life, and other writings of his apostles, and resulted in the formation of Christendom. There is then a marvellous unity, of a kind, it will be seen, in, for the most part, the books that go to make The Bible. But about its history more hereafter perhaps. All I

had to do just here was to give a very rough and absurdly inadequate hint as to the kind of book we have now to deal with. Here, then, we say, is our book.

But it comes to man. It is for man.

As yet indeed it has not come to all men. In fact, not many generations have really had it in their possession, and of these only a few of the European nations. Still, in speaking of the book, we say it is for man ; and this, notwithstanding the fact that, till within the last few centuries, not many of the populations of the world have had it. The great Egyptian nation of old, the Assyrians, and many others, never had it, or anything like it. The famous Greek people, who rose to such a height in philosophical speculation, in art, &c., were left altogether without this light. So were the Romans, some of whom—especially in the best times of the Republic—attained to great loftiness of character. Naturally, we cannot refrain from asking ourselves, What had they in the absence of that which now seems to us so indispensable? Did God not care for them? or not care for them so much as He cared for the Jews? Was He altogether neglecting their education? Were they left in total darkness, because they were left without the book which we do not know how sufficiently to prize? No one will dare to say that. Certainly, not any who love Him, and are filially jealous for his honour, and that his name be not blasphemed. Nor did even the noble Paul often say anything much finer than when he so boldly demanded : Is God the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? and, trampling under foot all Jewish exclusiveness and narrowness, forthwith answered—and most emphatically too—his own interrogative : Yes, of the Gentiles, also!

The book then comes to man. Let us say that it is (in whatever way He hath seen fit to order it) given by God to man. It is therefore intended for an unspeakably important purpose. It addresses itself to him. This therefore presupposes something—presupposes, I think, much. It would be useless, absurd, to put it before an animal, or before an idiot. The being addressed must previously have some intelligence; some power of understanding and of reasoning; some sense of right and wrong; with some feeling, however vague, that he is bound to do the right and refuse the wrong. If Truth present herself to him, he ought to be able to perceive that it is Truth.

In order to understand the being whom the Bible addresses, it would perhaps be best to take him as we find him, where no such external revelations had ever come. The Egyptian, the Greek, the Roman, were men; they were capable of acquiring information, of storing up knowledge, of reasoning, of constructing ethical systems, &c. They had such terms as virtue, vice; right, wrong; good, evil; just, unjust; true, false; noble, base; honourable, shameful; and the like. They believed in powers superior to man, divinities, whom he was bound to honour; and often—generally indeed—that there was One Supreme over all. Him they spoke of as The Father of gods and men. They cultivated what we call natural affections. The mother loved her child. The child was bound to honour his parents. The citizen was expected to love his country, and to be ready to sacrifice everything for its welfare. Friendship was held in honour. So was gratitude. So was hospitality. They had their moral ideals. The Greeks had their ideal *wise-man*, or *good-man*. So that,

taking into consideration all this, and much more that I cannot pause to specify, we say, that God had not been unmindful of these nations ; had not dealt with them in any niggardly fashion. They had a moral nature, and there was much in all their every-day life to appeal to this, and call it out into action, and, by so doing, to cultivate and strengthen it ; whereby some of them attained to considerable excellence. In nearly all the literature of ancient peoples that has come down to us, we find some things that intelligent Christians gladly approve, admire, and pronounce as true as anything they find anywhere. They can illustrate, can even enforce, many Scriptural truths, by similar utterances from heathen writers—from the philosophers or tragedians of Greece, for example. The parallelisms of this kind that wise Christians have been delighted to find would make a fair volume.

The upshot of all this? A two-fold conviction. First : that God did not leave the non-Jewish races without light ; which is what the Scriptures also abundantly affirm. Second : that man, having what we may call moral perceptions [no matter, just now, how we may account for the existence and growth of these], is, by the nature of things, bound to honour them, to have faith in them, to trust them ; and feels that he is so bound, too. They constitute his early capital, his stock-in-trade (if I may use the expression), wherewith, by honest use, he may attain to whatever moral and religious satisfaction is attainable by him, under the circumstances in which he is placed. By these he must judge of whatever comes to him as truth—moral, or religious—demanding his acceptance and loyalty.

I wish my readers to ponder well this proposition,

very simple, but very, very important ; and pregnant with consequences I cannot stop to point out. Perhaps he will anxiously ask, Is it Scriptural ? I wish with all my heart he may. For how glad the thoughtful and reverent lover of the Bible is to know that his precious volume takes this very ground can hardly be told. Christ spake of "the light which is in" a man, and warned his hearers to "take heed to" it, lest it should (viz., by not being sufficiently honoured as authoritative) dwindle, grow less, and finally go out in utter darkness. His Apostle John speaks of "the true light which lighteth every man ;" and Paul, writing to the Romans—who knew well what they had been before their conversion to Christ, and what their heathen countrymen still were—speaks of the "Gentiles who have not the law (the written revelation which the Jews had), doing by *nature* the things contained in the law," and thereby showing "the work of the law written in their hearts" (*i.e.*, by the finger of God, who, by this token, was careful of them, and present with them, invisibly but really teaching them, and warning them, and prompting them to the right), and goes on to say that "their conscience bore witness thereto," and that their inward thoughts characterised and judged their conduct, approving or else blaming it.

Now light is one. There may be much or little, more or less, but it is ever essentially one and the same thing. The light that struggles into the dungeon of the prisoner, or finds its way into the sick chamber, and that which floods the world on a summer day, differ only in quantity, in amount. And if the eye of any one were so wanting in the proper function of the eye that he could not see, if it were a blind or dead eye, the

same as no eye at all, it would be all the same to him whether it were the scanty ray that struggles through the dungeon-bars of the captive or the flood of light which fills the summer sky. But if his eye be healthy, so that he can perceive the little that visits the prisoner, how surely will he perceive the splendour of the summer noontide—*i.e.*, if he will but walk abroad in it. The beautiful would appeal in vain to us if we were absolutely without any sense of beauty. But if I instantly say of something, That is beautiful ! I can say of something else, That is more beautiful still—more beautiful than aught I ever beheld before ! So the man who can say, Here is light, can say, Now there is more light. Just so the Greeks could pronounce Aristides a just man, though some of them did not love him the more for it. But they knew righteousness from unrighteousness. If I show a child an orange for the first time and wish the child to taste it, and the child manifests some reluctance, what can I do ? Why, press the juicy fruit to the child's lips, to be sure ; then, like Oliver Twist, he will ask for more. The orange, by virtue of being what it is, appeals directly to some part of what he is, and he says, Nice, nice ! Honey appeals to the sense of sweetness, and the fondness for it. And so there must be something in truth to appeal directly to something in man. If God addresses man, man is, *ipso facto*, proved to be such as God can address ; he is proved to be already so made, so constituted, so endowed, as to have in him something—more or less—that God can appeal to. And accordingly the Apostle Paul may be regarded as standing for all those speakers for God whose records constitute, to a large extent, our Scriptures, when he says (2 Cor. iv. 2), " By manifestation

of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." If a man can say, *This* is true, he ought to be able to say, *That* is true also. And doubtless can, unless the something further and higher prove, for some reason in himself, to be unwelcome. Then he will probably say he does not see it. In the nature of things, the highest truths will be unwelcome to the man who does not want them, and he will always have excuses for not acknowledging them to be truths. So a diseased eye finds light intolerable ; but that does not prove that the human eye is not capable of perceiving light. And we want no proof that light is light. The light is its own evidence. *What* authority can be needed—nay, what authority can there be beyond itself—to satisfy us—or to prove—that sunshine is sunshine ?

Now, just glance here for a moment at the way in which God's prophets of old presented themselves to Israel. As a rule, it is not alleged that they produced any credentials of their right to speak in the name of the LORD. Here were evil things being done, or about to be done, and they stood up and denounced the evil, and encouraged the good. Having their own souls steeped in the love of righteousness, being zealous for the right, nobly enthusiastic for the will of God, they saw more clearly than others to the very heart of things, and could not but speak forth the word which was as fire in their very bones, and which, as surely as they could know anything, they knew in themselves to be from God. Then the men who had any reverence for truth and righteousness and God, recognised that these powerful speakers were uttering truths ; and the men who loved darkness rather than light hated them

and their words. It was so with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, and the rest. Nay, even when Jonah was sent into a foreign capital, to Nineveh, he gave no preliminary *sign* that he was a messenger from God. There was nothing to commend his message to the people but the force there was in the words themselves. And as the people knew in themselves that they were vile, when a solitary man stood boldly in their midst and warned them that for their wickedness their city would be destroyed, their consciences felt the righteousness of the denunciation, and they repented. So John the Baptist had no other credentials of his mission than lay in the forcible rightness of his burning appeals; yet all the people, we are told, counted John as a prophet.

But what is the drift of all this? it may be asked. This :—The facts of the case would naturally lead to the belief that the history of all these men and of their doings and their sayings (if, happily for the world, recorded in a book, or books, for the “admonition” of all, being “profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for discipline in righteousness”) would come among men in the same simple and direct way that the original prophets themselves did. Before Isaiah spoke to the people, or John the Baptist, or Paul, he did not begin with saying, “I am inspired by God, and infallible; therefore, hear me, and believe me.” No: each spake what was in him to speak, and knew that the truth would commend itself to the true, though it would be disliked and opposed by others. It was just so with Christ himself. He said, Every man that is of the truth heareth (receiveth) my words. When the Pharisees demanded from him “*a sign*” that he was worthy

to be believed, he refused to give one, because nothing can add to the authority of Truth. Truth—moral, spiritual—proves itself. And if men do not see it, the cause is in themselves, and not in the deficiency, or entire absence, of outward signs and credentials.

Now, of course God could have ordered things differently. He could have appointed one of the seven angels of the Apocalypse, with his trumpet, to herald every prophet, thus compelling attention, and then enjoining the implicit reception of all the prophet's words. God could certainly have multiplied outward signs to any extent to authenticate his servants, and make any doubt of their trustworthiness impossible. But He did not adopt this method. Therefore it was not the best method, for we must maintain that God ever adopts the best—*i.e.*, what He sees to be best, not what we think would be best. And we, too, may see that his method is best. For one thing, it would not be best for men to be so completely overpowered by external tokens that truth is truth, as that they would be yielding rather to that which was external to truth—and no wise related thereto—than to the truth itself. Their attention and their homage would have been diverted, and would have been wrongly bestowed. So Christ might have come in such a manner—with so much outward splendour and pomp and power—that all the people from Dan to Beersheba would have acclaimed him king. But where would have been the good of that?—the moral and spiritual good, I mean. How would "the thoughts of many hearts" have been "revealed"? How would the spiritual discernment of the individual have been appealed to and cultivated? What effect would it have had on the conscience? on

the heart? How would pure and undefiled religion have been advanced? How would devoutness, and trust, and meekness, and love have been nurtured? The homage would have been rendered to the outward glory, not to the inward; to the physical, not the moral; to the accident, not to the reality. No; the soul is benefited by receiving Christ for what he is, not for the sake of aught that is not intrinsic. Christ, the man; the poor man; knowing the pangs of hunger, oppressed by the sun's heat, thirsty, weary with the day's toil; but evermore meek, holy, going about doing good; nourishing himself on the will of God, and strengthening and exhilarating himself therewith, as to him the very wine of life; ever pouring out truths as the fountain pours forth sparkling waters; with not a particle of self ever actuating him, but ever effacing himself (so to speak); the friend of publicans and sinners; dominated by so consuming a love to the Father and to men—God's wayward, ignorant, wilful, disobedient, and unhappy children, whom he regarded as his very brothers and sisters—as that he could hail the idea of suffering any extremity for their sakes;—I say, the receiving of such a Christ into the heart will do a man all the good in the world, make a new creature of him, make him (not nominally, or constructively, but) really a child, a son of God in his measure, like Christ, whom he has welcomed into his heart, who lives in his heart, so that ultimately he shall be one with the Father and the Son.

Oh, was it not every way best—*i.e.*, for highest, holiest, spiritual, and eternal purposes—that Christ should have come in the way he did, rather than in the way the world would have preferred?

Now, HE *was* THE WORD—THE WORD OF GOD. Do

you ask what is the bearing of all this on our present object? This: First of all, let us reserve this title, not for a book, but—for *him*. (I wish I had space to show you how thoroughly Scriptural this is.) And, Secondly: If the prophets before him, and then he himself, came in this quiet, unpretentious way—owing absolutely nothing at all to aught that was factitious, but wanting truth, as truth, alone to prevail with man, appealing to the conscience, to the judgment, to the heart—may it not be our wisdom to refrain from laying much stress on any of our human theories about either inspiration or infallibility, but simply let the Bible speak for itself, and commend itself by its own intrinsic excellence and power over all that is truest, rightest, and best in men and so walk the earth even as did he, who was THE WORD *made flesh*?

Here I must reluctantly break off, but I hope to continue the subject in my next. Meanwhile, let the perplexed come to the Bible as to a most many-sided friend, and let them avail themselves of just that in it which is, at the time, the most helpful; and they will find that ever more and more in it “finds” *them*, and they will learn to speak of the truths revealed through psalmists, prophets, evangelists, apostles, Christ himself, with as much honest enthusiasm—not forced—as any bibliolater. Thus they will get only pure good.

NO. XVIII.

*ABOUT THE BIBLE*

(CONTINUED).

IN continuance of the line of thought suggested in the preceding Letters on the Bible, I wish to invite the attention of my readers to the account of our Lord's visit to Sychar, in John iv.

Christ seemed to the woman at the well an ordinary Jew. To a common observer, indeed, he was in no wise distinguishable from others of his people. In fact, he was "in all things made like unto his brethren," and this, we are told, "behoved him." He entered into conversation with her, framing his discourse with that marvellous tact which love alone is master of, till, from the perfectly natural request of a draught of water, he was presently speaking to her of the very best of spiritual blessings, and she was listening; she, a woman—as so many would say, with what is meant to be very significant—no better than she should be; a woman evidently of strong passions which she had not cared to keep under true womanly control; for she had had five husbands, and was now living with a man unwedded. Few of the godly or very righteous, I fear, would have ventured to compromise themselves so far as to enter into such close intercourse with such a woman. But love never stands on its dignity, and is supremely indifferent

to consequences to itself. By-and-by the woman hurried off, leaving her waterpot behind her, and hastened into the city, full of wonderful thoughts, which had been born in her quickened soul by the words of Jesus, and eagerly informed the men that she had met with one who must be, she believed, the very Messiah himself!

Now, what had caused this incipient faith? There had been no miracle, no sign. Mark that, please. But he who is the Truth had been manifesting himself in suitable words, and in words only; though, of course, there was that air of truth about the speaker which is helpful towards the desired result if any part of the moral nature is at all open to be convinced of spiritual truth. There was, you see, nothing but the truth; which, however, "*found*" the woman, and she was ready to receive the truth simply by its own credentials.

At the request of the Samaritans, who were impressed by the woman's statement and her own evident conviction and earnestness, Jesus abode with them two days. We hear of no signs whatever wrought by the Master to prove that he was indeed a man sent from God. He simply lived with the people for a couple of days, and spoke to them. The Christ, such as from the Evangelists we are able to portray him to our own mind's eye, sat with them, ate and drank and conversed with them in the way we know of, and, as the result, "many more believed because of his own word." His words carried conviction into their understandings and persuasion into their hearts. They were such words—parables, declarations about the Father, teachings on the nature of true blessedness, &c., &c., such as we have abundantly in the Gospel—as we can read any day

for ourselves in our New Testament. They had only the presence of Christ,—which we too can realise,—and the words of Christ, which we too have,—yet they believed, and their own statement is instructive. They said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world. And still the true Christ—the Christ of God—needs only to be fairly presented to the conscience, to the heart, to the understanding, and, where there is any moral preparedness, any spiritual receptiveness, any hungering and thirsting after righteousness and God, he will be his own evidence. And the faith in him which springs up in the heart, simply because of what he manifests himself to be, is the deepest, truest, mightiest, and most satisfactory kind of faith; infinitely better than any conviction which is forced on a man, whether he likes it or not, by overwhelming and crushing evidence of the external kind; such as so many nevertheless crave.

Yet one more illustration. Once, when the Master had said some things that the poor, carnally-minded Jews had carped at, murmuring, This is a hard saying, who can hear it? and went away, Christ turned to the twelve, and asked pensively, Will ye also go away? Then Peter, speaking for them all, said, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of eternal life! You see, what had laid hold of Peter and his brethren was the words they had heard fall from his lips, and which they had felt in their deepest soul to be true, and quickening, and helpful, and saving. Ponder it well, O friends!

You will, I presume, scarcely need that the bearing of all this on our proper subject should be pointed out;

or, if so, it is soon said. If Christ was his own evidence, if his words made their way wherever prejudice and determinedly-cherished wrongfulness did not shut and bar the door of the heart, how can it be necessary?—how can it be desirable?—how can it be otherwise than variously harmful?—to precede, and flank, and rear-guard the Bible with armed theories of our own; instead of letting the truth that we say it contains bear its own witness, now to the conscience that needs to be pricked, now to the wounded or broken heart that needs to be solaced and bound up, now to the understanding that yearns to be enlightened? And as to things in the Bible that do not enlighten, or teach, or guide, or help the earnest soul in any way, why, “What is the chaff to the wheat?” I shall have something to say about that too, by-and-by, but just now let us keep to one point. When we have got all the good we think we can get from the Bible, and still find ourselves ever getting more and still more, the theory about it that we may legitimately desire will be born out of our own noblest and divinest experiences of what it is to ourselves. Meanwhile, God does not demand our preliminary assent to any of our human theories about its inspiration or infallibility, or anything of the sort. The grandest of the apostles, as modestly as truly, said of himself and his fellows, We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. If, then, the apostles—who were as much in advance of the prophets and psalmists of Israel as David was superior to the feeblest of the people, and as the Angel of the Lord was superior to him (for this was one of the prophetic previsions, see Zec. xii. 8)—I say, if the apostles, charged with the

fulness of the Gospel of the glory of the blessed God, spake thus of themselves in comparison with their treasure, how shall not we too be well content to admit that the vehicle in which the truths of the Bible are enshrined is, so to speak, an earthen vessel, about which we are not greatly minded to contend that, instead of being earthen, it is golden, but care only for the "treasure" it contains to be appreciated?

This ground, I think, gives us the only quiet resting-place for the enthusiastic lover—not so much of the book as—of the truths whose sum total is the truth in the book—which the exigencies of our day make it imperative for him to discover and to hold. But here he can sing to his heart's content his twenty-third psalm, the very psalm for such as he. Secondary means may be immensely serviceable, but it is the Lord alone who can be our Shepherd; it is *he* must lead us in the paths of righteousness; and these are the green pastures and still waters the true soul thirsts for. Some good and devout Christians have fallen into the same error in regard to the *Bible*, that they complain men of science have fallen into as regards *Nature*. These, they allege, are so taken up with the sufficiency—the all-sufficiency—of Nature, that they do not note—do not feel to need—the GOD, whose presence and power in it alone makes Nature what it is. And just as Nature hides rather than reveals God to some, so the Bible may (though with the best intentions of honouring it indeed) be so handled as to hide rather than assist in revealing the ever-present God and Spirit of all Truth, whose immediate presence and enlightening help it is that we need. Anyhow, as God is infinitely more than Nature, so is He infinitely more than the Bible. And even if it had been

written by the very finger of the Almighty, from beginning to end, and had been given to us ready bound from heaven, even then there would have been the danger to guard against of letting the gift take the place of the Giver, and of forgetting the fact that God is infinitely more and better than any of his works. And it is the ever-present God himself that we need to look to and depend on, using the best of his gifts as with his eye and his hand upon us for present guidance and help of whatever kind we need. To proceed, however.

Here is the Bible. Its latest page was written eighteen centuries ago. But here also are many other things. Here are to-day, for example, many sciences, many discoveries, many ascertained facts. We have geological facts, ethnographical facts, and many others. Do I not need, then—is it not a necessity of the understanding, a necessity of my moral nature even, of my conscience—to have so true a conception of the Book as that my attitude towards all other truths can be consistent with my profession to be an entire, and honest, and impartial Truth-lover? Shall I so love *this* truth as to hate and shut my eyes to *that* truth? Shall I so use my precious Bible as that thereby I suffer myself to be prejudiced against and deprived of other truths otherwise revealed by God? Yes, revealed by God: for the man of science can only receive what (whether he knows it or not, whether he will acknowledge it or not) God reveals to him. God has his prophets of science as well as his prophets of morals and religion; and though the latter are, of course, immensely the more important, yet the former are not unimportant either. A theory of the Bible which could

be held very consistently ages back, becomes, by God's other teachings in time, untenable now. Formerly, men abreast of the knowledge of their time could believe that the world was willed into existence, and completely furnished and stocked with tenants all in one week of six days; and that only some six thousand years ago! Is there a man whose opinion is worth a pinch of salt that can believe that to-day? Must I not, as a lover of the Book, and precisely because I revere and love the Book (or rather, much that is in it) have such a theory of it as I can hold in a museum of geology, in the observatory of the astronomer, or beside Lord Ross's telescope on a starry night, in presence of the deciphered records of ancient Egyptian dynasties, and while listening to careful unfoldings of the way in which languages were formed and of their relationship to each other in pre-historic times, seeing words have their histories as well as rounded pebbles and worlds? Shall I—can I—as an honest man, cling to such views of the Book as that I dare not avow them anywhere and everywhere, but must skulk away into churches, and cower and shrink from halls of science and learning? And is this the way in which I honour my Bible, and manifest my reverence for, and my confidence in, all truth?

None the less, however, is the present a time of much perplexity, seeing that the old landmarks are being peremptorily removed, and, to many, the fresh staking out of the ground within which they may safely abide is not yet accomplished. And I know of no class who have a greater claim on our tender and reverent sympathy than those who thus seem to themselves to be listening only to conflicting and irreconcilable voices. What, however, I as a sympathising friend should like

to say to them would fill volumes ; and this is out of the question. I shall, therefore, commend to their careful perusal a work or two by men who deserve the ear of the whole world.

In 1862, Dr. McLeod Campbell gave to the Christian Church a little volume of immense worth, entitled, "Thoughts on Revelation, with Special Reference to the Present Time." (Macmillan and Co.) The price, I think, is 5s. I have lost no opportunity of recommending it.

Having, on the first page, quoted Gal. i. 8, he thus commences his treatise : "It is thus that the Apostle writes to the Galatian Church, tempted to listen to false teachers who perverted the Gospel of Christ. No language could express more strongly *the independent character of faith*. Having received the truth, they were expected to hold it, with a confidence *altogether irrespective of the channel through which they had received it* ; so absolutely so, that the Apostle's unsaying what he had taught would not justify their ceasing to believe. Nay, if any supposable higher personal creature authority, that of an angel from heaven, were to commend another Gospel than that which they had received, they were to reject it. Not, of course, that the cases he puts were to the Apostle's mind possible cases ; but his putting them is as instructive as if they were possible." Thus he is led at once "*to the inherent authority of truth, and the self-evidencing nature of light* ;" which is the key-note of the little volume.

Our author proceeds : "There are three classes of persons whose immediate feeling in regard to whatever seems to them a questioning of the Divine authority of Revelation we easily anticipate. 1. Those whose faith

in Revelation rests on the assumed infallibility of the Church. 2. Those who have ceased to believe in Revelation. 3. Those who have a true faith in Revelation, *being in the light of the truth which it reveals*. It is natural that the first effect on each of these classes should be an increase of satisfaction with their own position; and we see that superstition is clinging with more confidence to its blind faith, and that infidelity is encouraged in its scepticism, while we cannot doubt that any trial of their faith, to which those who are abiding in the light of truth are finding themselves subjected, is strengthening to their faith. But we may hope that the discussions which are raised, while a sure gain to this last class, may eventually be profitable to many of the other two classes also, through the clearing away of much of the mist of confused thoughts on the subject of the Divine authority of Revelation, in which men too easily rest, but which is as alien to true faith as it is favourable to superstition and unbelief.

“Nothing can contribute more to this desirable result than increased simplicity and decision in taking this high ground, on the subject of faith, which we see the Apostle taking with the Galatians. Nor can we, standing on any lower ground, put forth the real strength of Christianity in its conflict with superstition and infidelity; while there are multitudes in whom a certain amount of superstition and infidelity are present only as alloys in a real Christianity, from which they may be delivered by being forced to realise and rest only in that in their religion which belongs to them as children of the light and of the day.”

I have quoted the above that my readers may be induced to follow my advice, and buy and read this

little book, which I deem to be worth many perusals. Indeed, I would advise many to make a study of the book, the writer of which was one of the most Christ-like men our age has been blessed with. But, of course, no one will profit by it, or by any other book, or by any wise ministrations of the best of preachers, who is not bent on surrendering his whole being to the light. Yes, his whole being. Not the understanding merely; but the conscience and the heart, so that he may live in the light, and walk in the light, even as God is in the light. I fancy that not a little of the perplexity of the present day is occasioned by the absence of this thoroughness in eagerly assimilating all truth, that it may become a part of our living selves—of our daily and hourly life. Truth is not a thing for us to amuse ourselves with; it is our life. He who always waits on the ever-present God alone for enlightenment and teaching, in whatever means he uses, will not read without great advantage this little book by one of his most insightful child-servants.

I shall now earn the thanks of some of my readers afresh by as heartily and affectionately commending to them another volume of great value: "*Catholic Thoughts on the Bible and Theology.*" By the late Frederic Myers, M.A., Perpetual Curate of St. John's, Keswick. (Isbister and Co.) Price, I think, 7s. 6d.

Mr. Myers was a man of rare mental quality. Capable of long-protracted and persistent thought, from the beginning of a thing in its first principles right through to the end, he was evidently as calm as the summer evening sky, with a most saintlike reverence and devoutness, and a candour and a charity instinct with zeal for the Truth not often met with. Admirably accom-

plished for the service of Truth, he devoted the years of a quiet and secluded life to work for the coming generation, which he foresaw would sorely need it. So long ago as 1841, he wrote the volume above named, and printed, but never published it. This, and another book, "Catholic Thoughts on the Church of Christ and the Church of England."

Only a few friends were privileged to know of these precious works. Perhaps it was the excessive modesty of the man which withheld him from publishing them. However, the late admirable Bishop of Argyll and the Isles, on his death-bed, charged certain of his friends to lose no time in giving to the world these two volumes, of whose usefulness in these days of perplexity he was profoundly convinced. So to Bishop Ewing, in a sense, under God, we owe the publication.

Mr. Myers had a marvellous insight into the nature of the things he was absorbed in, as well as being fully abreast of all the results of modern discovery and criticism in the realm of Biblical literature. The reader will find that he loved Truth too well to acquiesce in "pious frauds" concerning either the Bible or the Church. He knew *the facts*; and he would neither conceal nor gloss them over; but he was imbued with a reverence without which it is perilous to a man's own soul to deal freely with such a book as the Bible. I know of no man who has rendered the Church of to-day greater service than Mr. Myers. And it gives me unspeakable satisfaction to put my readers, if they will let me, into the hands of these two servants of God, who have now been called up higher, still to serve, though we as yet know not where or how. For it must be evident that it will be utterly out of the ques-

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tion to think of dealing thoroughly with such a subject as the Scriptures in these Letters, which must now, indeed, draw towards a close.

My next will probably assume the form of a dialogue instead of a letter, as enabling me better to deal with some questions which my readers may wish me to touch on before concluding the present series.

NO. XIX.

*ABOUT THE BIBLE*

(CONTINUED).

AS I must now be bringing these Letters to a close, it has occurred to me that there might, perhaps, be a change of form with advantage. Let me, therefore, have a little conversation with one of the many querists who have from time to time favoured me with communications.

*Friend:* I find, as you have suggested, nothing but pure gain, every way, from regarding the Bible more broadly than I was allowed to do when young. It had been so peremptorily forced upon me, that, I confess, it seemed to come to me like a severe schoolmaster with a rod in his hand, or a turnkey that was for shutting me up in a stone cell. To find, instead, a friend, a father even, who only seeks to do me various good according to the need of the hour, and who will let me frankly state any difficulties that I feel about this or that, instead of frowning upon every honest thought that will assert itself, is more than a relief; a yoke is lifted from my neck, and a chain of pearls hung there instead. But still I am not without my difficulties.

*Writer:* I do not suppose any thoroughly honest man will ever in this life find himself without. But the more painful kind may gradually get lifted; and, in the

course of his experience, finding how light ever comes sooner or later, and how one thing after another that was dark gets cleared up to him, he acquires a sort of tact and confidence towards those difficulties that remain, or that may yet emerge to view. The great thing is to be thoroughly faithful to what light we have. This is the first thing, and the second thing, and the third thing. But what do you wish to say on our present subject? Speak freely, for Truth herself beseeches you ever to be transparent, and not to try to force conviction nor to make-believe.

*Friend* : Well, there are statements about God in the early books of the Bible, which, to put it mildly, are apparently—and I think happily—contradicted by the later Gospel revelations.

*Writer* : Superseded, perhaps, rather, or left behind, as we leave the crudities of childhood behind as we advance. But I am glad you say what you honestly think. And I dare say none of the grim warriors of Israel ever dreamed the day would come when from Jewish lips should fall the saying, God is Love; and when even Jews should receive a command to go into all the world and preach the glad tidings to every creature. Let us understand that in the systematic teaching, education, of the human race it was necessary to begin at the beginning, and to go on towards perfection slowly, as the not very docile generations could receive it. The law of progress—if we understand what that is and involves—will afford a key to much. Take a child. Give it its first notion of God, and begin to bring it into harmony with a higher and wiser will than its own. Do you expect a grown-up worldling to listen and then go away and represent that you have such-and-

such notions or beliefs about God? If you are to be overheard, would you not wish the listener to be a person of candour and common sense?

*Friend* : Very true. I see that the idea of a law of progress will account for much ; but still, there is at times a fierceness, a vindictiveness, about the judgments ascribed to God, from which, I confess, I shrink.

*Writer* : I understand well what you mean, and can sympathise with the feeling, which, I doubt not, often takes the form of holy jealousy for the honour of God, which you think to be brought into jeopardy or question by the representations given.

*Friend* : That is so. How do you do with these things?

*Writer* : For my own part, nothing shall ever make me believe of God that which I see and feel to be unworthy of him. I will no more blaspheme Him in one way than in another. But I have learned caution in acting on this unchangeable resolve.

*Friend* : I do not exactly take your meaning, I think.

*Writer* : Some things that would shock some minds do not shock me, nor, I think, would shock them, if they had more breadth of view, and robuster consciences.

*Friend* : Will you come more to the point, please?

*Writer* : Suppose you were appointed head-master over some hundreds of unruly schoolboys, full of all sorts of mischief, and some of them really bad. Or suppose you were captain of a vessel, with a number of ladies and other passengers on board, and some of the crew began to mutiny. This case happened to a friend of mine. Five mutineers, armed, came into his cabin, with the wildest demands, expressed in the most insolent manner. Tell me whether the immediate want of

the hour is just a mouth that butter won't melt in? Whether a soft, coaxing method is the wisest to adopt? For myself, I would, in the case of the school, apply myself, in the very first place, to get some order into it, and to have rightful authority respected. All I meant subsequently to show myself to be of genial and gentle I would reserve till the fitting time came for it. I quite go with Pope in the line, "Order is heaven's first law." As to the vessel, my captain-friend was equal to the emergency, as the mutineers found. He was prompt and thorough. Why, even with your own child, is it not indispensable that you soon begin to teach him to respect your will, instead of always having his own? And so, may not many things have been necessary in earlier ages, that were never intended to be final revelations of God's character and method? Take, for instance, a horde of slaves like the people of Israel in Egypt. Can they be licked into shape, moulded into a nation, with wise laws and good institutions, so as to develop statesmen, and patriots, and bards, and sages, and present to the world a spectacle of a well-ordered community?—I say, can this be accomplished by a copious aspersion with rosewater? I think it is so good to learn to obey, to learn reverence, to be thrilled with awe even, to know even what terror is (and would not the old Greek tragedians have something to say about the purifying effect of saddest grief and wildest terror?)—I say, I think all this so good in itself, and so indispensable as a basis for noble characters and happier experiences to be developed out of, that I am not myself scandalised at the manifestations of strong rule, nor at the insistence that a righteous will should be obeyed.

*Friend* : Yes, I see I must go with you in all this ; and so I suppose the alleged destruction of the Cities of the Plain appears to you only as a righteous sweeping away of abominations that could be tolerated no longer ?

*Writer* : I think our own Carlyle would say so. But shall I tell you what I think lies underneath so much of our modern sensitiveness as to the apparent harshness of many of the alleged doings of the Jehovah of the Hebrews ?

*Friend* : Any ray of light, however feeble, will be a God-send to me, I assure you.

*Writer* : Well, people have read of these Old Testament things with a certain prepossession in their own minds, which of itself has thrown a lurid glare on deeds which did not appear at the time to impugn the character of God.

*Friend* : What is this impression that you refer to ?

*Writer* : It has been taken for granted that when all those men, women, and children were swept out of existence here, they were swept into another world, where even a far worse destiny awaited them ; where, in fact, they would continue to exist in full consciousness to be tormented by the wrath of the Almighty for ever and ever. Now, if there had been no *à priori* belief of this kind, their having been judged unfit to pollute the earth any longer by their presence would not have seemed so tremendous a blot on the character of Him whom Christians have learnt to call Father, and that, not only when thinking of themselves, but when thinking of their brothers and sisters all the world over.

*Friend* : Please to carry your thought a little further.

*Writer* : Well, if we had been authoritatively told that when all these reprobates (or shall I say unfortu-

nates?) had ceased to breathe, they had also ceased to exist, then the catastrophe would not so much shock us. But suppose the truth should rather be, that God has innumerable worlds into which to draft off those that leave this earth, and innumerable methods of wisdom which He knows how to bring to bear, and that all who were unfit to remain here, spoiling this spot of earth, should be put under wise treatment there. I only say suppose it; and would not that put another face on the thing altogether?

*Friend:* Undoubtedly it would. And it would help to relieve a very great portion of the horror with which we cannot but regard much of what is reported to us from day to day now. But——

*Writer:* Yes, I understand that little adversative conjunction, and the subject is one I cannot enter on here. But I say, only suppose it were so; would not that enable you to read with less discomposure some of those old Hebrew records?

*Friend:* Undoubtedly it would; but still——

*Writer:* Well, all I care to do just here is to enter my protest against those stories being read under the impression that all those men, with their wives and little ones, were hurried out of this life into a state of irredeemable and never-ending torment. But our time is short. We cannot go into any subject thoroughly. I can only offer a suggestion or two.

*Friend:* The revelation of a law of progress, and the principle that we of a later day are to read of the methods pursued towards the earlier generations by the light of the nobler and happier revelations of God that came afterwards, will do much, I think, to clear my way. But there are other things in some parts of the

Old Testament which seem to me—may I speak freely?—what shall I say?—*bizarre*, childish, absurd. What about them?

*Writer* : Leave them. Bring your mind into contact with all that is helpful. Fill your soul with all the self-evidently true, devout, noble, divine things in the Bible, and be very much at your ease about whatever may be exceptional. The time may come when you will get light on this also ; and if not, it is of little consequence. It is not as though you were bound to have a hard-and-fast theory about the book as a whole, as a preliminary and a *sine quâ non* to your grandest use of it. If I do not know what to say about the sun and moon standing still at the word of Joshua, or about a talking snake, or a speaking ass, is that any reason why I should not live my life with him who was born at Bethlehem, who wrought and taught so divinely in Galilee and Judea, yielded himself to the cross on Calvary, and reappeared, the Conqueror of death and the Demonstrator of immortality? Shall I suspend my enjoyment of "the unsearchable riches of Christ," till I am satisfied about the animal that Balaam rode on? Why, which would be the greater—of the two?

*Friend* : Thank you.

*Writer* : But, mark you. When as a free-born child in God's own house, which Christ is over, I fill my bosom with all the treasures I can find or use, and then at times have a leisure or an idle hour in which to look at things of less importance or no importance at all, I often find that things—which come upon in another spirit might have proved stumbling-blocks, against which I might have bruised myself, or even been stopped by and finally hindered—lose their formidable

aspect, and have no more power afterwards to discompose me than the stump of a tree which, till I walked up to it, looked in the moonlight very like a ghost.

*Friend* : For instance ?

*Writer* : Well, I suppose by this time everybody has ceased to be staggered by the statement of the sun's arrest in mid-heaven by the word of Joshua. Every Sunday-school teacher fit for his task can give the accepted explanation of that now.

*Friend* : Some of the alleged miracles seem very trivial, and some make a very great demand on one's—may I be pardoned if I say, credulity ?

*Writer* : The set of the current in the present day—at all events, with many, and with some even who wish to retain what they would call the religious element in the Bible—is against miracles altogether ; and therefore a low estimate is formed of the book in which they are so abundantly recorded.

*Friend* : And how do you, who, I think, try to keep yourself informed of all the phases of unbelief, feel on the subject ?

*Writer* : All depends on the previous question. Some men have begun with such a conception of the Supreme Power or Ultimate Force, as that the idea of miracles is *à priori* blocked out. For me, believing in "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," I find it impossible to lay down, either, that God *could not*, or that He *would not*, deviate from his otherwise uniform methods. With my idea of God, it is but the merest common-sense and common-place to say, that, *for a sufficient reason* He would, of course, so deviate. Then the question involves itself into that other : Could *any reason* be adequate for such action ? And then to say,

It is conceivable, is certainly nothing *outré* for a philosopher to turn up his nose at. And then—believing the material universe is for the sake of the spiritual and moral, that if God is our Father in any worthy sense, and we are his children, anything that revealed Him better to us would not be incredible—I can easily believe that what we call miracles may have been a factor used in the training of our race. Take the crucial one of all—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead—I can no more put off from my inmost soul the certain conviction that he rose from the dead, than I can put off my skin. And this being so, I do not care to fight the battle over again every time I come to some alleged instance of something having happened which, so far as we know, could not have been brought about by any laws of nature that we are cognisant of. At the same time, I have no difficulty in admitting that there may be accounts of alleged miracles very insufficiently supported. We talk of free-hand drawing ; well, I for one have the habit of free-hand reading ; and roaming amid such treasures as I find in the Scriptures, picking up jewels of price at every step, I sometimes give but a glance at, and sometimes turn away altogether from, things that have no moral lesson to teach or spiritual truth to give me (at all events, just then).

*Friend* : Practical, at all events. You lay stress on the proportions of things.

*Writer* : I do. What is the chaff to the wheat ? is a question I have often found useful. Now look. I see that Divine Man of whom the New Testament is full. I see what he was to such grand men as Paul, for example. I gaze again and again upon that Majestic Face where, as says the apostle, you may behold—that

is, if you have eyes to see—the glory of God. I do see it. Well, now, do you think I shall let the pigs of Gadara stand effectually between me and—*HIM*!

*Friend*: I see that all questions sink into insignificance beside the question of the reality of the historical Christ; and I am glad to feel immovably persuaded that to believe he was what Evangelists and Apostles bore witness that he was, is much more credible than to believe that those humble Jews either invented the Christ altogether, or improved on the actual original. I believe in the Christ (substantially) of the Gospels and Epistles.

*Writer*: Then in spirit (by thought and longing and realisation) walking hand in hand with him through life, what I further say about the Bible is, that, using it as beneath his guardian eye, and using it with full honesty of mind and purpose, you are as free to use it as the child is free that sits at his own father's board. You belong to the same body as the writers; and there is not one of them who would not say to you as the angel to John, "I am thy fellow-servant." And perhaps he might add, in such a day as this: "Let nothing that I or any of my brethren have written in the old, far-off ages come between thee and the Lord of Life and Light. Yield thyself to God alone. Be true. Be righteous; be courageous and strong and good. Steep thy soul in love—the love of God and thy neighbour, and cleave to Christ with full purpose of heart. So shalt thou presently come up hither, and where the Lord of thy heart is, there shalt thou be also."

\* \* \* \* \*

*Friend*: I see your drift. You would say—Use all that you find usable, and leave whatever you, at the

time, find no help of any kind, till a more convenient season.

*Writer* : You take me correctly. Have no theory about the Book as *a whole*, which would only hamper and embarrass you. It is as full of moral and spiritual helpfulness as the summer sky is full of light. But the light comes not from the sky, but from the sun, and our Sun is not a book, "but the LORD shall be thine everlasting Light, and thy God thy glory." It is possible to put the very Bible itself between God and the man's own soul ; between this present living soul of to-day, I mean, and the living God and Father of to-day. It is *in Him* we live and move and have our being, and, as the sun is ever streaming forth with fresh effulgence, so God is ever revealing himself freshly. Through our ignorance and prejudice and folly, even the Scriptures have not been an unmixed good to men, which is what they ought to be, which is what they will be, when the crude assumptions of a day that is passing have ceased to occupy the ground and domineer over the convictions that, nevertheless, could not be suppressed.

*Friend* : Yes, I see. You would have me, even in using the Scriptures, be all the while in reality waiting upon the Present God Himself. You think that I, or any one else who is sincerely bent on knowing the truth of God and doing God's will—for you identify the two—may say with the Psalmist, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak unto *me*."

*Writer* : I have no more doubt that "the word of the Lord," or "the voice of God," comes to Englishmen to-day, than I can doubt it came to Hebrews of old, whose inner ears were open to its whispers.

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*Friend* : Before you quite conclude these endeavours of yours to help "the Perplexed," there is yet one other subject which I greatly wish you would touch upon, but which I hesitate to mention.

*Writer* : And that is——?

*Friend* : May I say it? The permission of Evil, and so much of it, and of so appalling a character, too.

*Writer* : Well, I think with you that these efforts to help "the Perplexed" would hardly be complete without some reference to this subject, and so I will gladly intimate the direction in which I myself look for what light may be vouchsafed on this matter. But let me warn you not to expect that *I* can lead you out into the broad sunshine of an Eternal day. For myself, I am devoutly thankful for what alleviation is honestly attainable, but, like all others who know that the mere surface is not the depth, I wait. I can only say my face is towards the East.

NO. XX.

*THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL.*

SCENE: *The study of a Ministerial Friend.* PRESENT: *The Friend; a Student for the Ministry; and a Lady, somewhat under middle age, thoughtful, and of a quite sufficiently sensitive nature.*

*The conversation had been proceeding some time when the Reporter quietly took his seat without being observed.*

\* \* \* \*

*Lady* : I can never tell any one what I have suffered in my mind for these many years, from the fact of so much sin and misery existing in, what I must nevertheless believe to be, God's world. And it has endured so long now! Oh! it is fearful. I am appalled by it; yet I cannot get away from it. It casts a fearful shadow on my daily life, and yet has a terrible fascination for me. At times the burden is too heavy for me.

*Student* : When I became a candidate for the ministry, I thought I had a glorious Gospel to preach; but in some of my journeys as "a supply," I have come into contact with a class of men I had never met before, and questions have been put to me I had never thought of, and so could not with any honesty pretend to answer. Once I was asked, Why a gospel of salvation had been allowed to become a necessity? Why had not preven-

tive measures been adopted, instead of merely remedial ones after the mischief was done, since "prevention is better than cure"? And one question has led to another till now I feel as if I wanted years of private thought for myself before I could be at all fit to preach to others. I could so easily be asked questions which would strike me dumb—if I were honest, and did not pretend to more knowledge and faith than I really have—that I confess to having now but little wish to speak. I want rather to sit at a wise man's feet.

*Friend*: I congratulate you with all my heart, both on the discovery you have been making and on your desire to sit at a wise man's feet. I, too, would gladly sit with you there. If you find such a one, tell me; and I, also, will come, as the Eastern Magi, following their star, came to Bethlehem. And yet—"Wisdom hath builded her house; she hath hewn out her seven pillars; she hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table; she hath sent forth her maidens; she crieth upon the highest places of the city, &c., &c." I dare not convey the impression that we are left altogether in the dark on this grave problem.

*Lady*: If I did but know where to obtain any real relief, I would gladly go barefoot on a pilgrimage to any shrine where a true oracle could be persuaded to give clear replies to my heart-corroding questions. But, alas! where is there such?

*Student*: Now that I have had more opportunity for reading, and learning a little of the intellectual history of the world, I see that this mystery of evil has always more or less sat like a nightmare on the heart of humanity.

*Lady*: Oh, sir, are *you* never weighed down by it?

Is *your* sleep never hindered by the frightful evils that abound everywhere? Is not earth one vast place of graves, or, rather, an Akeldama, one huge field of blood? "The air is full of farewells to the dying, and mournings for the dead."

*Student* : Longfellow ! But nearly all the poets I know anything of strike the same chord. Wordsworth speaks of "the burthen of the mystery of all this vain and unintelligible world," and of "the still sad music of humanity;" while such as Byron say out, in strains that sound like blasphemy, what many hearts think or feel, but would shrink from expressing.

*Friend* : It is so. Nothing would be easier than to compile a bulky volume of quotations from the literature of the world, all to the same effect ; and it would be like the roll of the prophet, "written within and without ; and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe."

*Student* : Yet you still preach on, sir. You have been a preacher for these forty years, I think. And in your sermon on Sunday you said that joy was the keynote of the Christian religion.

*Friend* : It would be apostolic—would it not?—to sing out cheerily all down the line, as if with a bugle voice, Rejoice evermore !

*Lady* : But—text for text—"Jesus wept."

*Friend* : Text to text. I write one of these two on each palm of my hand. I go to all my work with these two words written in characters of gold before my eyes, graven on my heart.

*Lady* : God give you a helpful word to speak to me then, sir, for no one ever needed it more than I do.

*Friend* : Light can come only from the Father of

Lights. However it may be with *us*, *He*, at all events, "is in the light." "He is Light, and in him is no darkness at all." Is not that a comfort?

*Lady* : How, then, please?

*Friend* : Why, that there is no mystery, no darkness whatever, to Him. So that if I could only go up, as it were, and stand beside Him, look from his standpoint, see with his eyes, I, too, should know the peace which passeth understanding.

*Student* : But that cannot be. How can we stand side by side with Him, and see things as He does?

*Friend* : I did not mean to indicate that we could. I said *if*. But *faith in Him* is as good as seeing all the ins and outs of things for ourselves. If I am sure *He* sees, I am content to let Him see for me, till such time as I, too, shall know even as I am known.

*Lady* : You can be content to walk in the dark if you know that He who has taken your hand in his is himself in the light?

*Friend* : I thank God I can. We can walk, and be strong, ay, and sing too, by faith; while all our thought and all our life-experiences go to strengthen and justify our faith.

*Student* : But is not the desire to know, the wish for light, perfectly legitimate? If we have ever so much faith for ourselves, so that it fully answers our own needs, yet ought we not to be able to speak a word in season to others, to the Perplexed, for example?

*Friend* : Unquestionably. Let us try to have a large and full and masculine understanding, as well as a fine conscience and a robust faith.

*Lady* : Do, then, tell us how you answer the Sphinx yourself.

*Friend* : Shall we state the case, first of all ?

*Student* : I shall be content with the putting of the late John Stuart Mill.

*Friend* : Yes ; his conclusion is either that the Creator is not omnipotent—that He has limitations he cannot pass, obstacles he cannot surmount—or, else, that He is not perfectly benevolent. He decides that the Creator must be wanting in either power or goodness. Well ; I have great respect for Mill, and think if he had lived longer he would have approached a true Christianity much nearer than even his posthumous essays indicate. Still, I do not find myself impaled on either horn of his dilemma. But do you know how Dr. Newman puts it in his “Apologia” ?

*Student* : I have not read the book. Is it here ?

*Friend* : Here is the volume ; be so good as to read to us the passages you will find pencilled in the margin.

*Student* (reads) : “. . . . I look out of myself into the world of men, and there I see a sight which fills me with unspeakable distress. The world seems simply to give the lie to that great truth of which my whole being is so full [the being of God], and the effect upon me is in consequence, as a matter of necessity, as confusing as if it denied that I am in existence myself. If I looked into a mirror, and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which actually comes upon me when I look into this living, busy world, and see no reflexion of its Creator. This is to me one of the great difficulties of this absolute primary truth to which I referred just now. Were it not for this voice speaking so clearly in my conscience and my heart, I should be an atheist, or a pantheist, or a polytheist when I looked into the world. I am speaking for myself only ; I am far from

denying the real force of the argument drawn from the general facts of human society, but these do not warm me or enlighten me; they do not take away the winter of my desolation, or make the buds unfold and the leaves grow within me, and my moral being rejoice. The sight of the world is nothing else than the prophet's scroll, full of lamentations and mourning and woe.

"To consider the world in its length and breadth, its various history, the many races of men, their starts, their fortunes, their mutual alienations, their conflicts, their enterprises, their aimless courses, their random achievements and acquirements, the impotent conclusion of long-standing facts; the tokens so faint and broken of a superintending design; the blind evolution of what turn out to be great powers or truths; the progress of things as if from unreasoning elements, not towards final causes; the greatness and littleness of man, his far-reaching aims, his short duration, the curtain hung over his futurity, the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin, the pervading idolatries, the corruptions, the dreary, hopeless irreligion, that condition of the whole race, so fearfully yet exactly described in the apostle's words, 'having no hope, and without God in the world';—all this is a vision to dizzy and appal; and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery which is absolutely beyond human solution."

*Friend*: There, lady, does John Henry Newman state the case strongly enough for you? or shall we read a few lines from Voltaire's "*Poème sur le Désastre de Lisbonne*"? You have your difficulty presented forcibly enough there, at all events.

*Lady* : Oh, yes, I know it too well. You mean the lines beginning : "Comment concevoir un Dieu, la bonté même, &c." I would rather know how a Christian theologian like Newman meets the problem that he evidently knows so well and feels the full painful force of.

*Student* : Shall I go on, then ? "What shall be said to this heart-piercing, reason-bewildering fact ? I can only answer that, either there is no Creator, or this living society of men is in a true sense discarded from his presence. . . . And so I argue about the world ; *if* there be a God, *since* there is a God, the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity. It is out of joint with the purposes of its Creator. This is a fact, a fact as true as the fact of its existence ; and thus the doctrine of what is theologically called Original Sin becomes to me almost as certain as that the world exists, and as the existence of God." Then Father Newman finds the solution in "The Fall," as narrated in Genesis. Does that satisfy you, sir ?

*Friend* : We'll come back to that presently ; perhaps you may as well read the conclusion, which I expect he had in his mind all along.

*Student* : (reads) : "And now supposing it were the blessed and loving will of the Creator to interfere in this anarchical condition of things, what are we to suppose would be the method which might be necessarily or naturally involved in his object of mercy ? Since the world is in so abnormal a state, surely it would be no surprise to me if the interposition were of necessity equally extraordinary, or what is called miraculous."

*Lady* (with a sigh) : The old orthodoxy !

*Friend* : It hangs well together, however,—does it

not? I do not wonder that theology—only take heed what you so designate!—should be called the queen of the sciences. There is something awfully grand in the vision of a fallen world thus sublimely redeemed.

*Student* : But, sir, must not the theologian, first of all, make good the fact of a fall? For it seems to me that redemption rests on that, as its foundation. And yet, in the present day, the narrative in Genesis has difficulties for us that theologians of a preceding generation were not troubled by.

*Friend* : It is so. So many seemingly unquestionable facts now—converging from so many quarters, too—seem to show that the human world is thousands of years older than the chronology given in Genesis, that every candid lover of the Bible must admit—for what but truth dare we care for and honour?—that the question is a fair one, and must be for the present an open one, whether the early pages of the book are bound to be regarded as the literal and exact account of an historical and objective occurrence; or, whether some other solution may, if not must, be found.

*Student* : But if the Eden narrative is not literally and historically taken—however true and valuable the instruction that may be found in it on some other interpretation—is not the very basis of the doctrine of redemption undermined?

*Friend* : A most fair question; but I answer, No; and I think it a most perilous thing to stake the New Testament doctrine about Christ on so precarious a foundation as the absolute necessity and indispensableness of accepting the Genesis narrative as literally and historically true and exact. To do so, we have to shut

our eyes and ears wilfully to the ascertained facts of many of the sciences.

*Student*: But can you hold the New Testament as firmly if you let go the Mosaic narrative?

*Friend*: I do not let go the earlier narrative. I read it in my own way, and am full of wonder and delight at the amount of truth in it, though I distinguish between *the true* and *the actual*. And then, how much more we know about the more recent books of the New Testament than we can about the composition of the ancient Book of Genesis, which palpably is a very composite structure, with one knows not how many successive editors. At all events, I love Christ and Christianity too much to make the third chapter of Genesis its basis.

*Student*: But if man be not fallen, what need of redemption, and so of a Redeemer?

*Friend*: Perfectly fair again. I am glad you are not afraid to think a thing through, or, at least, to try to. But perhaps your theological studies may have made you acquainted with the fact that some reverent thinkers have believed that even if the notion of a fall of a federal head of the race, involving all successive generations to the end of time, were not adopted, there might still be as much room left for exactly that eternally wonderful intervention. The state of man, the state of the world, is what it is, whether we have, or have not, a Divine philosophy and *rationale* of its genesis. Every man who knows himself will confess that he himself has fallen over and over again; that his own career illustrates the story of the Garden of Eden, even if it has to be construed as an allegory or parable. I have fallen, you have fallen, and the world

is full of men and women who have themselves fallen. So that if there is any advantage in having a fallen world as the preliminary for room for redemption, we have that only too palpably, *as a fact*, and without building on a foundation which, if we dare to use our eyes, we may see to be, at the best, somewhat dubious. But further. Even without laying any stress on this too certain *fall*—which we can all verify—I can quite conceive of man—having been made with such capacities for indefinite progress, with, at all events, the capacity for immortality, and yet being what he is—altogether needing—(if his possible destiny is to be fulfilled, if he is to be recovered and raised and be perfected)—just such a Revealer of the Father, Manifester of God, Atoner, Captain of salvation, Elder Brother, Prophet, Self-sacrificing Priest and King, Example, Inspirer, Prince of Life, and Lord of Glory—in a word, Incarnation of the Divine—as the New Testament indisputably shows Christ to be.

*Student*: Then—pardon me—where is the difference between your belief and the old orthodoxy, if I may ask the question?

*Friend*: As you pursue your studies you will often come across the strange phenomenon that the reputed heretic holds as firmly as any by the old truth, only that he seeks to divest it of the crudities that have gathered about it, and to rest it on a surer basis. But let us never trouble ourselves about orthodoxy or heterodoxy, but devoutly care only for what is true.

*Lady*: All this is very interesting, but I am afraid if I do not take the liberty of putting in a word, you two gentlemen will be led on from one thing to another till

our proper subject is lost sight of, and I go away with my old burden as heavy as before.

*Friend* : Pardon me, lady ; but having had Newman's picture of the world and his alternative so plainly stated—viz., either no God, or else the fall of a federal head, involving the entire race, and thrusting it and keeping it far from God—I felt bound to suggest that his alternative seemed too peremptory, and withal somewhat rash ; that, accomplished theologian as he is, he keeps, of course, within the theology of his own Romish Church, and cannot take cognisance of a freer theology outside.

*Lady* : Then, please, now let us return to our subject.

*Friend* : With all my heart. Is Newman's picture black enough, and terrible enough ? or would you like to throw in blacker shades and more crimson colours ?

*Lady* : What need ? We all know what a fearful amount of suffering and evil in all its forms there is. How are we to regard it ?

*Friend* : Newman's orthodoxy fails to meet the question. For, supposing we consent to trace all to "The Fall," technically so called, the question returns—Why did God permit, why did He not prevent, the catastrophe which issues in such oceans of blood and tears ?

*Student* : Besides, we want some satisfactory answer to the question for men whom the Romish theology does not satisfy, who do not care for it, and who want some clear and plain thinking on the subject, if any is to be had.

*Friend* : There are many men with whom I fear I should simply have to decline all controversy on the subject.

*Student* : Why ?

*Friend* : Because they would need to be previously convinced of the being of such a God as it is the only stay of my heart to believe in. But if we three can be content to take the ground taken in these Letters to the Perplexed, and start on this subject with a happy belief in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I shall be delighted to show how I get what little light for me falls on this terrible problem.

*Lady* : Any way you please, so I may but get even a little relief.

*Student* : I, too, accept the ground taken in the Letters referred to.

*Friend* : Well, then, to return to the beginning whence we started, in order to get a sufficient statement of the evil in the world ; and not presuming to teach others, but only as a brother to tell frankly how I find relief, I ask, first of all, whether, prior to getting any *rationale* of the existence of evil in God's universe, there is not peace for the troubled soul in the fact of God's absolute supremacy,—his perfect knowledge of all, and his necessary satisfaction with all his own designs? He has undertaken, with clear insight and foresight, all the responsibility of a Creator, and his conscience must be untroubled and calm. Resting here, I, for myself, can await the light He may hereafter vouchsafe. God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in all intellectual as well as other trouble. And I feel bound in reverence to Him, and in justice to those I seek to benefit, to try and bring them, first of all, to REST IN GOD.

*Lady* (in a tone of disappointment) : Any peasant that believes in God, the most illiterate Christian, could take *that* tone, and rest *there* !

*Friend*: Thank God, yes. Poor bed-ridden women and worn-out old field-labourers in our union work-houses, as they need the same air to breathe and the same sun to shine upon them, so they need the same truth as our best thinkers and our noblest philosophers, or our *dilettante*, would-be philosophers. The greatest and most vital truths are for gentle and simple alike. Humanity is one, and hearts, I find, are fashioned pretty much alike, and the Father of the spirits of all flesh cares for, and as much provides for, Hodge as for any Mill or Hamilton. And child-like faith, trust in God, will secure peace to peer and ploughman, to philosopher and peasant, alike. "Thou wilt keep that man in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee."

*Lady*: Yes, I see that if any one has such complete faith, such implicit confidence, in God, his mind will have found its anchorage.

*Student*: "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace *in believing*," is the text you preached from on Sunday evening, and is to the present point, I see.

*Lady*: Still, have you nothing to add to that, sir?

*Friend*: Volumes. Where shall we begin?

*Lady*: Let us look at the outermost circle of the sentient creation first, then; and afterwards come on to the human and moral world, where the shadows lie darkest, and look, to me, like glooms from the pit.

*Student*: But moral evil and the wretchedness it involves is the heart and core of the mystery; if we can get light on that, we can afford to leave the other.

*Friend*: Is not the lady right? We shall clear the way, and approach our deeper subject more advan-

tageously perhaps, if we begin as she suggests. What troubles you here, lady? What is amiss to your mind?

*Lady*: The sufferings of the lower creation. And why did the Creator call into existence fierce wolves, and lions, and tigers, and alligators, and——

*Friend*: Your catalogue will suffice, perhaps. But you have wrapped up two questions in one. First, "Why did God create tigers and alligators, &c., &c.?" He has not told me.

*Lady*: Then don't you know?

*Friend*: I can give a pretty good guess.

*Student*: So can I. I find no puzzle in that.

*Lady*: But I do. Why should there be such terrible creatures? and why does death at last put an end to all the innocent lives in creation?

*Friend*: Another question still. But, with even the little light I have, if I were set to create a world, I feel I could not do better than copy the old one, with the stinging bees, and the eagle with its talons, and the lion, and the bear, all through.

*Lady*: You would?

*Friend*: Yes, I would; I would make my circle of Natural History a true and complete circle. You have an aquarium, I know. Why are you particular as to the proportion of vegetable and animal life?

*Lady*: The balance has to be preserved.

*Friend*: The balance; yes, I thought so. Keep up the idea of a balance, please; it may help you. But now as to bears, wolves, and tigers, and all such creatures, the world would be a much poorer world without them, wouldn't it, now? I confess I feel sorry for the later generations of men, who will, by-and-by, only know of such things from old books and pictures care-

fully preserved. It is a richer *fauna* that we have than we should have if there were only sheep and cows and such like. Besides, how much our vocabulary would be defective. We actually want all those creatures for our language. In such a human world, with such men as some are, we should want our most characteristic epithets and illustrations.

*Lady* : Are you serious ?

*Friend* : I am not joking, although I may be speaking lightly. But as to the death of all the creatures, is that really a difficulty ? If they did not die, they must live on. Would you rather see sheep, and dogs, and horses ten thousand years old ? They must either die, or be immortal ! I think, lady, I shall beguile even you of a laugh, if I suggest to your fancy an immortal—donkey !

*Lady* : I see they must die.

*Student* : To be sure they must ; and so there is a constant succession of young life, and so, again, the sum total of enjoyment is immeasurably increased. And to die, almost suddenly, by the spring of a tiger, or the snap of a bigger fish, is better than a lingering death by old age or starvation.

*Lady* : I see. Some suffering seems inevitable.

*Friend* : Happily, yes. But it will do you good, lady, to look a little more thoroughly at the other side of things, even as regards the lower creation, and I will get our college friend to read to us another page or two. And as we went just now to the extreme right of our theology, we will keep the balance that we spoke of by now owing an obligation to the extreme left. Kindly read these pencilled paragraphs from the American Parker.

[*Student reads the well-known passage from Theodore*

*Parker on the bountiful distribution of joy among all the lower ranks of living creatures.]*

*Lady:* I see there is another point of view than that I had too much confined myself to ; but the unspeakably darker and more awful problem still remains untouched.

*Friend:* Well, yes ; but I must reserve that part of the subject for another opportunity, such as, I hope, may arise for the continuation of our talk. Meanwhile, let me hope that the state of the animal creation, at all events, no longer presents to you quite so terrible an aspect. While, by no means, shutting our eyes to any proof that, as St. Paul says, the creation was made subject to vanity—indeed, that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now,—there is much alleviation. They do not anticipate old age, the possibility of food failing them, or death. They suffer, when they do suffer, only in the passing moment, neither from the memory of past injuries nor from the dread of future ones ; while, as every token declares, their enjoyment of the transitory present is as great as their nature admits. Added to all which, the Christian's hope, ay, and belief, too, is, that in the great mystery of Everlasting and Redeeming Love the creation shall one day be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and shall share, according to its degree, in the blessedness of the sons of God (Rom. viii. 19—23). St. Francis of Assisi, you will remember, entered so thoroughly into the spirit of the word, Go into all the world and preach the glad tidings to *every creature*, that he did literally speak to the animals, and tell them that they were redeemed creatures, and call them, therefore, his brothers and sisters in the Lord. I wish I were as simple-hearted as he.

NO. XXI.

*FINAL TALK ON THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL.*

SCENE—*The Study, as before.* PRESENT—*the Friend, the Student, and the Lady.*

*Lady* : Let us consider the lower creation done with, and come on to the more appalling evil that has wrapped our common humanity in its awful folds.

*Student* : Ay, the sin and misery of the world, which it would take a God to gauge. Is there any light whatever to be cast on the subject, sir?

*Friend* : You have probably noticed a trick I have of lingering and looking round about a subject before going quite up to it. But often by so doing I have found that when I have at last come right up, face to face with it, half the formidableness was gone.

*Lady* : But you don't wish to linger now, sir, do you?

*Friend* : Well, lady, before touching the mystery of evil, I should like you to—what shall I say?—may I say, look with me into a certain mirror, that I for one make much use of?

*Lady* : A mirror? I know you are not a man to trifle with such matters, or else I should think—

*Student* : Ah! if there were but a kind of Divinely magic mirror, into which we *could* look, and see what our hearts are almost breaking with the longing to see!

*Friend* : How do you read a book ? Where do you begin ?

*Student* : Begin ? At the beginning, certainly.

*Friend* : I don't always. Sometimes I look first of all to the last page, so that I may know what the author is driving at, and then I am better prepared to begin with him at the beginning, and go right on. But on our present theme, I find no satisfaction except in both beginning and ending with God. He is the Alpha and Omega. And just now I should like to act on the maxim, Look to the end. *Finis*, you know, *coronat opus*, and so I propose the mirror.

*Lady* : The mirror !

*Friend* : Had not Paul and John something which we might not unfairly so designate ? Paul looked into his glass—Divinely wrought, and given him from above—and saw the end, the consummation, of the present cycle of things ; saw all things subdued to the glad acknowledgment of the One essentially good and holy Will ; saw all in heaven, and on earth, and in the under world, offering spontaneous homage to the visible representative and vice-gerent and *alter ego* of the invisible God ; saw the all-along planned and pre-determined *finale* of the present confusion and disorder, which is the eternal establishment, on a sure and everlasting basis, of the Divine order—God being All in all things and all creatures, so that then that new cycle of glorious being may be entered on for which all that has hitherto been has been only the preparation, the tuning of the mighty orchestra, preliminary to such an Oratorio of the Universe as all shall delightedly acknowledge to be worthy of Him who is even now Perfect Love, which is Perfect Life, which, again, is Perfect Light.

As the Master said, A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come ; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. The hour of travail for the universe, which is to issue in eternal joy, may well seem long ; but patience and courage, heart ! through faith in Him who knows the end from the beginning.

*Lady* : But, Sir——

*Student* : Then, I suppose——

*Friend* : Shall we take another look through this God-given glass ? I seem to myself to have been in Patmos. Methinks I have stood side by side with John "in the spirit," and have both seen and heard the entire creation all harmonised to the exulting praise of God.

*Student* : You refer to Rev. v. But that takes for granted that the Apocalypse is written by John, and——

*Friend* : Oh, yes, I know all that controversy ; but as we cannot go into that now, let me simply say that whoever did or did not write the book, *we have it*, with its glorious visions ; and, for one thing, it has put a key into my hands which I find too precious to part with. It was when he "was in the spirit" that he saw and heard ; so that if I, or you, or any other, can only be "in the spirit" too, why, the old prophetic word may as well be fulfilled in us as in any other—the word quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost : "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh ; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, &c." (Acts ii. 17, 18.) I have in my inmost soul the vision of a redeemed and transfigured universe, all so gloriously

worthy of God, and looking so God-inspired, and withal in such complete harmony with what Peter said of "the times of *restitution of all things*, which *God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets*, since the world began," that only the hand of God himself can obliterate it, and force me to the mortal—yes, death-giving—conviction that I had conceived of a God more glorious than the reality!

*Lady*: But, sir, all the evil that is desolating the world *is*, and the future is so far off! How does the vision which lights up your soul with gladness account for, or make amends for, the millenniums of unspeakable wretchedness? If the universe is to be one day swept clean of sin, why not have forestalled that happy—though to me distant and hazy—future, and made it all clean and bright from the beginning? Why have let in sin and all evil, and suffered the whole earth to be desolated thereby, even if it be only for a time? Think of the sin! and think of the suffering!

*Friend*: A very natural question. You think it would have been better if every one of God's creatures had been either made incapable of sinning and of suffering, or been forcibly prevented from both the one and the other.

*Lady*: I do.

*Friend*: I don't. At all events, it is plain that God did not judge so. And can you not see, at all events, *some* compensation for the non-prevention *ab extra* of sin and suffering?

*Lady*: Alas! none.

*Student*: I see some, I think.

*Friend*: You speak of both sin and suffering. Let us for a moment separate them.

*Lady* : But how can we? All suffering is a consequence of sin.

*Friend* : That is commonly said, but I more than doubt it.

*Lady* : Oh, sir! Surely you don't believe that there ever would have been pain if there had not been sin first?

*Friend* : Why not? Sin must bring in misery, but mere pain is not of necessity a consequence only of transgression. Would you wish that we had been created so as that pain should have been impossible? If sinless Adam had put his hand into the fire, or innocent Eve had run a thorn into her foot, or harmless little Master Cain or Abel had tumbled down on a rough path, you seriously think that fire should not have burned, nor thorns pierced, nor flints have cut, nor water drowned?

*Student* : With such a system of nerves as we see the beauty of, does not the capacity for pleasure involve the capacity for pain, if the perfect laws of nature are ever so unwittingly broken?

*Friend* : I should say so. Pain is the monitor that warns against danger, or if it come too late for mere warning compels us to adopt measures for remedying the harm we have incurred. Pain, taken by itself, is no impugnment of the perfect benevolence of God, and would have been a fact of experience in such a world as this, and with such bodies as ours, even if sin had never entered, although we may see how sin envenoms pain. Do you really think, lady, that the possibility of the creature's suffering is a blot on the character of the Creator?

*Lady* : I have thought so; but I think I have a

glimmering sense that it is capable of being quite otherwise presented.

*Friend* : Suppose now sin had never entered, yet pain, suffering of some kind, seems to me inevitable, besides the moral uses of it.

*Lady* : "Moral uses," even if there were no sin ?

*Friend* : Certainly. What room else for the passive virtues, or even for many of the active ones ? Fancy a race of men to whom nothing was a peril or a danger, so that courage and fortitude could never be ! You must blot out from your fancy world all your noblest heroes, leave no room for gallant deeds and bold enterprise. There must be no cold winds, no hard frosts (what would the boys say, and the skaters ?), no grand storms to awaken the sense of awe, no—but why enumerate ? I think even our schoolboys would exclaim, "What a lot of duffers !" and we must all confess that it would have been a terribly dull world. You must have had people that would never grow old, and never die.

*Lady* : Well, would not that have been delightful ?

*Friend* : Not to me. I prefer the present world with all its laws to any fancy one.

*Lady* : But death ! Oh, sir !

*Friend* : Well, if there had been no death, you and I should not have been here to talk about it. That's plain.

*Lady* : How then ?

*Friend* : Why, if none had died, the world would soon have been crowded with inhabitants, and ages ago there would have been no room for any more, so the multiplication of the race must have been stopped by some very stringent measures. A dead stop put to all marriage !

No more love of the kind that leads to wedded bliss! No more fresh and beautiful fatherhood and motherhood! Or, suppose there had been room just for us, what generations of old people, thousands of years old, we should be mixed up with! You would have these very bodies made immortal, would you? I think the Creator would not have gathered from us any hints for a better world after all. For one, I confess that neither pain nor death is any mystery to me. And I doubt whether our human relationships would have been so dear, or our affections so tender, or our sympathies so pathetic—but there would have been no room for the more pathetic sympathies—as now that suffering so often calls forth tenderness, and the certainty of death throws a halo of tenderest sanctity round our dear ones while we still embrace them. Death—that is, what we so call—is every way worthy of the wisdom and love of God. I am grateful that earth is but our birthplace and nursery and gymnasium, our place of education and training, and that the pale messenger, whispering in our private ear, says, Come up higher! But I should want to write a volume about it all, rather than utter a few fragmentary words.

*Student:* As a young man, with life before me, I confess I am glad there is scope for exertion, with things to do that are not easy, and things to bear that are not pleasant, and things to dare and to brave that will call forth manhood.

*Friend:* Why, what a poor, feeble race we should have been if the world had been arranged to please the sensitive ones that think Providence unkind when a child cuts its finger! God can far better train up a vigorous and experienced and noble race of immortals thus, than

by sheltering them from all possibility of hurt. Ay, and they will be far more capable of deeper and loftier joys, too.

*Lady* : But the angels ?

*Friend* : I don't know much about them. Perhaps they, too, have had their training. I should think it likely. If not, with what wonder and almost irrepressible admiration must they witness the numerous manifestations on earth of the sublimer virtues ; the calm, heroic endurance of martyrdom for truth, for instance !

*Lady* : Well, if I could be reconciled—as I see that, perhaps, I might—to just such a world as this, with its storms, and frosts, and calls for strenuous endeavour, and patience, and endurance, and sympathy, and all the rest of it, yet—Sin ! That dreadful mystery of sin is left.

*Student* : We had begun to touch upon it, when the lady interposed with the mystery of pain and death. I was going to ask her how it would have been if intelligent creatures had been brought into existence *minus* the will.

*Friend* : Exactly. Think, lady ! Would you seriously wish that none of God's intelligent creatures had been endowed with the power freely to will anything ? Would men or angels have been nobler, or even happier—which is another and vastly lower thing altogether—if created with no more will than a stone ? Or, can you conceive of a power and freedom to will *rightly* which is not necessarily, at the same time, power and freedom to will *wrongly* ?

*Lady* : I confess my thoughts have not gone far into this region, and I shall be thankful for a little guidance.

*Friend* : Speaking, then, *more humano* (which is the

only way in which we can speak or even think, and so using language which must be taken *cum grano*, without which it would be inadmissible), I venture, in thought, to go back to the time when as yet there were no such creatures as man, no beings capable of knowing God, and entering into his designs, and enjoying and rejoicing in and glorifying Him. You can conceive that there must have been—speaking with all reverence—a profound necessity in the very heart of a perfect God for creatures to whom He could communicate his blessedness. Infinite Love, that is, must have its objects. God would *want* to do all the good he could.

*Lady* : Yes, I suppose you are right.

*Student* : Vast as himself, one thinks, must have been the yearning of the Infinite Soul to bless ; and, therefore, for such beings as He could bless.

*Friend* : Then now let us ask, What kinds and degrees of blessedness ? Shall He set before himself, as their ultimate portion, the very highest blessedness possible, or content himself with inferior kinds for them ?

*Lady* : I should think He must needs want to have creatures capable of the very highest.

*Friend* : I think so ; and, therefore, you will say that my next question answers itself—viz., Shall races of creatures capable only of *animal* pleasures be the final order of things ? Do we in them reach our highest and best ?

*Lady* : A child might say No to that.

*Friend* : Make the animal of the highest type possible, as to form, instincts, &c., and then add intellect, such as we know it in man,—will *that* suffice ?

*Student* : Most certainly not. Mere intellectual animals—say bipeds—could never do justice to what

was best in God, could never transcend mere science ; would but be on the same plane with the beaver and the ant, however much their powers were exalted in degree, by the faculty of speech, &c.

*Friend* : So I think ; make the world of such creatures as beautiful as you will, and the creatures themselves perfect of their kind, it would be a world of mere frostwork and moonlight. Goodness, righteousness, holiness, the joy of self-sacrifice—and, therefore, of love—would not exist, even as ideas ! The heart of God could not rest *there* !

*Student* : So far plain.

*Friend* : But if now God goes farther ; if we, in following Him, have to rise into the moral sphere ; if, to the animal and intellectual, we add the affections and the will and the conscience, and all things are adjusted to this incomparably higher plane, what happens ?

*Student* : The power to choose—without which there can be no virtue, and, therefore, none of the joys of rightness—is a power to choose wrong as well as right.

*Friend* : Indisputably. And so the door is opened to the possibility of what we call evil. I think we cannot conceive of beings made capable of the highest good without their being thereby able to abuse their freedom and their powers, and so cast their crown in the dust.

*Student* : Yes, if they are to enjoy the blessedness of rightness freely chosen, and adhered to at all costs, they must be free to abuse that power of choice.

*Friend* : And the idea of the possibility of gaining by acts of self-will, instead of always obeying the will of God, is one that perhaps cannot but arise, creating a constant temptation, which temptation may become more

and more mightily irritant until the fatal experiment has been tried, and tried out, too, to the bitter end, with all the misery that cannot but be entailed thereby.

*Student* : Then evil, or at least the possibility of evil, was not indeed necessary, but inevitable ?

*Friend* : It seems so to me. That is, you know, if God would create veritable moral agents.

*Lady* : If that be so, one would almost ask, Then why create such at all ?

*Friend* : If, because of the possibility of foreseen evil, God had felt constrained to abstain from creating such beings, then evil—the evil foreseen—would have triumphed over the good that God wanted to bring in, and so evil would have had the everlasting victory ! Is that an idea that commends itself to us ?

*Student* : Certainly not. Then you think that the alternative before the Divine mind—speaking, as you said just now, *more humano*—was either to let the evil that floods the world come in, *or* hold his hand from creating such intelligences as man ?

*Friend* : It seems so. But this is not all. The idea of dealing with it, if it must arise, also comes in. And as it cannot be dealt with physically, it must be dealt with, if at all, by moral means. God, in giving way to the Divine passion for diffusing blessedness, and therefore creating intelligences that should be capable of rising to it, foreseeing the evil that will arise, plans within himself to deal with it. And, thus, creation from love involves redemption *ab initio*.

*Student* : Then redemption is not an after-thought ?

*Friend* : Certainly not. The Cross itself even—I mean the outward and visible cross on Calvary—was but the “manifestation” of that deepest love in God

which had been at the root of creation, so that the creation itself is born out of the self-sacrifice of the Creator.

*Student:* Those who, having been sinners, yet rise out of all the death of sin, and become holy, being heartily reconciled to God and his will, and are finally brought home to glory, will have learned more of the height and depth and length and breadth of the knowledge-passing love than they could otherwise have known?

*Friend:* Yes; the awful darkness of evil becomes the solemn background of the brightest manifestations of the Divine Character. As He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him, so I believe there is not any other form of evil which He will not abundantly utilise. I need not enter on the illustration of the profounder revelations of God and profounder experiences of man which the Divine Economist brings out of, or finds occasion for, in the evils which, foreseen, did not deter Him from creating intelligences who, whatever the intermediary experiences or spheres they would pass through, should ultimately be perfectly atoned to Him and his perfect will, so that then and for ever after God should be all in all.

*Student:* The guilt of sin is not at all lessened, I think, by this view?

*Friend:* If it were, that would reveal some fatal flaw in the line of thought. No; sin is sin. But we look forward in hope to the time when it shall be utterly subdued and cast out, and, by the terrible experiment having been thoroughly tried out to the uttermost, shall be for ever after impossible in the finally redeemed universe.

*Lady* : Is this all you have to suggest to mitigate the sense of unutterable misery and wickedness there is, and at the best will long be ?

*Friend* : I could say very much more, but our time is reduced to moments, and, however reluctantly, I fear I must now conclude.

*Lady* : But what is there for us to do ?

*Friend* : The noble work of co-operating with God in all his never-ceasing efforts to make you and all of us good and better, till at last He can present us all faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. Then shall be fulfilled, on a vaster scale than Hebrew seer ever dreamed of, the word of the prophet Zephaniah : " The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty ; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy ; He will rest in his love, He will joy over thee with singing."

NO. XXII.

*POSTSCRIPT.*

I CANNOT bring myself to part company with my readers without adding yet a word or two, if they will kindly indulge me.

I should wish them to understand that, on the various matters so briefly and imperfectly treated of in the foregoing pages, and which, for the most part, are so keenly controverted in the present day, I have studiously adopted a tone which does much less than justice to my own deepest convictions. Anxious not to occupy more ground than I am sure can be held against honourable assailants on all sides, I have been perpetually restrained from indulging myself in utterances which (as an old believer, whose faith has been only confirmed by all the fiery trials to which it has been subjected) would have welled up freely from that fountain in the heart which the Master guaranteed to all them that should ask him for the living water he declares that he can give (John iv. 14). To preach or write in the full consciousness, not only of fair and honest doubts, but often of objections and cavils that seem to betray a determination to find a flaw in everything that Faith exults to hold, is not favourable to the indulgence of that freedom which is the Christian's prerogative. It is, however, the condition imposed upon us for the present.

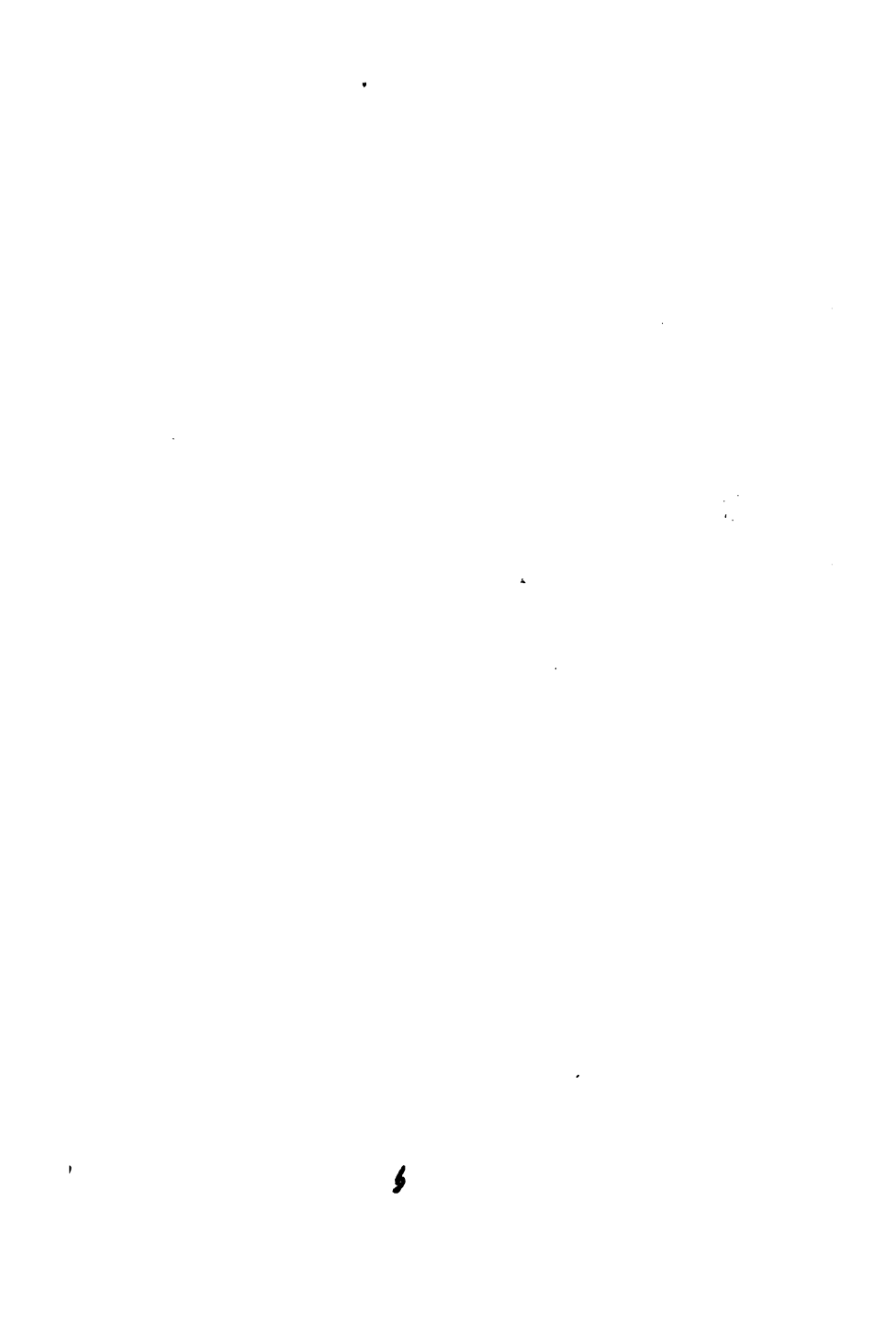
Only, I should like my readers to remember that the field of conflict is not the banqueting-chamber, and that what the Gospel invites to is a feast of fat things, of wines on the lees well refined. The (supposed) necessities of the case have kept me in the more northerly parts of the temperate zone—almost in a sort of island of Newfoundland—where the dwellers have no conception of the life and warmth and colour and glory of more genial climes. But if these pages should be the means of leading any reader from the servant to the Master, to our glorious Christ, then he will learn gradually to supply for himself all that in this little book is wanting.

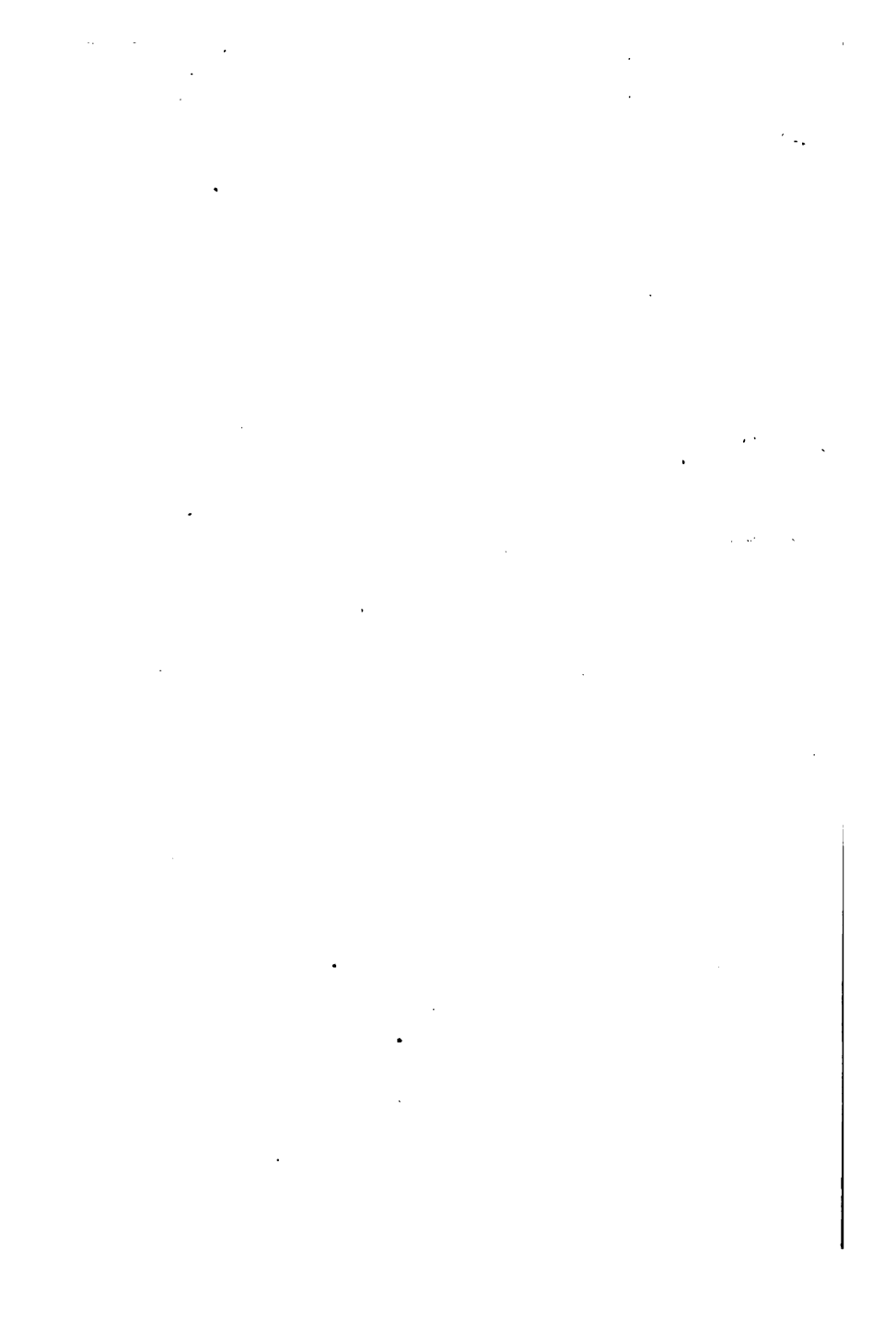
Looking back to the chapters "About Believing in God," I regret that I did not adduce and dwell upon what I believe to be the great proof which every man carries about with him, written by the finger of God on the fleshy tablet of his own heart. For more certainly than He reveals himself in Nature, does He lay his very hand on every man's *conscience*. There is that within him which he cannot escape from, which blames him for every fault, which takes towards him the tone of a rightful judge and ruler and Lord, which is independent of time and place and circumstance—the standing proof that this something is Some-one, that there is One who will not permanently lose his hold of his own creature, who is his own child. I say, I regret that I did not work out this line of thought, which I must now beg the reader to work out for himself.

And now I must say Farewell to those who have kindly gone with me through these pages, and very respectfully and tenderly do I add my most fervent GOD BLESS YOU!

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